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by

St. George Rathborne

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MONSIEUR BOB

A NOVEL

BY

ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "DOCTOR JACK"

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BOOK ONE.

The Fast of Ramadan in Algiers.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN FROM CHICAGO.

Algiers—the wonder city of the blue Mediterranean!

The yearly fast of Ramadan has run its course, and will soon be numbered with the departed. When the boom of the sunset gun rolls over the terraced heights of Mustapha Superieur, and echoes along the Vallée des Consuls, there will be great joy among the devoted Mussulmen, for then begins the feast of Bairam, as our Easter follows Lent.

For thirty suns every soul of the faithful host has daily made a pilgrimage to one of the few great mosques that still exist in the native quarter of Al Jezira, the balance having been converted by the French into modern buildings or churches.

In the mosque, during the long fast, all social barriers are leveled, and the scene is one to keep the looker-on in Algiers spell-bound. Jostling each other in their earnest devotions, may be seen wild Bedouins from the desert, ragged Kabyls, whose homes are in the mountains, negroes, turbaned Arabs, of stately mein, handsome Moorish merchants, and the various followers of the great prophet of Allah, known as Mohammed, all prostrating themselves before the little niche in a corner which marks the direction of Mecca. The only sound to be heard in this wierd place, with its motley congregation of kneeling worshipers, is the voice of the mufti, reading from the Koran, mingling wild lamentations with his words, and swaying his congregation as the leader of an orchestra does his players.

The spectacle is one never to be forgotten, and every stranger in Algiers who looks upon the interior of a mosque during these services, imagines that he has struck an insane asylum at the hour for physical culture—Moor and Arab, Soudan negro and mountain Kabyl, gaudily dressed Turk and wretched Biskari, all kneel and bow and rise again, acting like acrobats in the fervor of their singularly silent devotion.

Twenty years ago, had a Christian dog ventured into an Algerian mosque he would have been murdered, and the place consecrated anew. Now it is considered no desecration for a foreigner to enter any Mohammedan Temple, provided he complies with the law of the Koran, and leaves his shoes in the court outside.

On this, the last day of the great fast, a few Christians have gathered to witness the worship of the faithful. It is a sight that somehow fascinates the sojourner in the quaint city among the African hills, and causes him to come again and again,—a spectacle that must be understood only through description by the gentler sex, since a stern decree prohibits the presence of a woman in a mosque under penalty of death. The little group of foreigners consists of Frenchmen, Englishmen, Americans, Spaniards and a German, together with several Jews. Apart from them may be noticed a single man, leaning against the wall, and turning his head in a nervous manner every little while. He is no Adonis, either in looks or figure—his frame is a trifle angular, though to the experienced eye it shows wonderful traces of sleeping strength; while his countenance is a good, plain, common-sense American specimen of physiognomy, making up in force what it lacks in masculine beauty.

In a few words, Bob Crane is a man who inspires confidence. He has the reputation of being somewhat lazy, but good natured. It requires a good deal to stir this long-limbed pilgrim from Chicago into action; but if once fully aroused he is apt to prove a holy terror —at least that is what some of his friends say who have seen him get into a difficulty and climb out again.

"Monsieur Bob," they call him. It is singular how a name given in fun will cling to a man. Wherever the tall Chicagoan goes that cognomen follows, until he is forced to accept it as his title, and tack it on his cards.

To judge from his nervousness on this last day of the fast, one would not believe that Monsieur Bob could be called lazy. He seems wide awake, and as bright as a button. Indeed, one would imagine from his corrugated brow and quick glances around, that the American had something on his mind.

The innumerable lights make the interior of the mosque decidedly brilliant; the parti-colored garments of the devout worshipers, as they arise and prostrate themselves upon the soft, sacred carpet; the strange voice of the aged mufti, now rising in shrill sentences that cause intense animation among the energetic followers of Mohammed, and anon falling into a soft cadence that sounds like the water drifting over a gentle fall,—imagine this combination, and you have the scene upon which Monsieur Bob gazes, occasionally mopping his brow convulsively.

When the services are done, these mixed

worshipers will withdraw to the outer courts, where, among the orange trees, are fountains of consecrated water, in which they bathe face, hands and feet. Then resuming shoes or sandals they go their way; the mask of religion is dropped; and if, on the road to his mud hut in the mountains, the Kabyl sees a chance to rob or murder, he does not hesitate any more than would the Bedouin, riding toward his tent in the desert; the bastinado has few terrors for these wanderers of Algeria.

While Monsieur Bob stands there so uneasily, a man has entered the mosque. He, too, is a foreigner; his gray mustache has a military twirl to it, and there is a reckless, *debonnair* appearance in the man that somehow marks him as one of those dare-devil free-lances to be met with at times,—a soldier ready to fight under any flag, so long as he convinces himself as to the justness of the cause for which he is willing to shed his blood if need be.

These men are American ex-army officers, English soldiers, and even French and German ex-commanders. They may be found among the armies of Turkey, of Egypt, Persia, China and the South American republics. To them war is a pastime; glory the acme of human happiness; and whenever opposing forces meet in deadly strife these dogs of war rush to the scene to offer their services.

This man stands surveying the scene for a short time with a cynical curl to his lip. His long experience has taught him what a farce is being played before him; that the man who worships the most fervently now will, in an hour, be cheating his neighbor or beating the sultana of his harem.

With an impatient grunt this veteran soldier turns on his heel as though about to quit the great mosque. Just then his eyes fall upon the tall figure of Monsieur Bob, and here they remain. The soldier shuffles toward the leaning American as well as the red Turkish slippers he wears in the mosque will permit. Another minute and he is tapping the other on the shoulder, and giving him quite a start, if one can judge from the way Bob Crane glances around, and the exclamation that escapes him.

"Monsieur Bob, for all the world! This is indeed a pleasure, my boy. There, don't squeeze my hand, you giant; that grip of yours is enough to break every bone in it, and I reckon Aleck Shackelford may have use for that sword hand again some of these fine days."

The soldier says this in low tones; they are not near the worshipers, and, beyond a few frowns from some late arriving Arabs, wrapped in their *bournous*, who brush by, no one appears to notice them.

"Captain Aleck, I'm delighted to see you! More than once I've thought of that adventure in old Alexandria. We had a close call there, I tell you, man! What brings you to Algiers?" returns the other, still holding the brown hand of the military adventurer.

Shackelford smiles; he has a pleasant look when in good humor. Grizzled old war-dog that he is, once let him get on his fighting togs and his appearance will scare all the yellow curs of Algiers into spasms.

"The same old story, Bob,—seeking adventure. This world is growing very humdrum of late. I shall positively die of *ennui* unless something turns up soon, or ship to South America, where I learn there are prospects of war. Just to think, in the last few years I have seen only three engagements. There was Plevna, quite a jolly affair; the Dragoman Pass fight, when Alexander got his back up, and the bombardment of Alexandria. I'm deuced glad to see you, Bob; been thinking of getting up an expedition to visit the interior of this wonderful country; think we might see stirring times, and if we lived to tell the tale would have something to talk about. What d'ye say, my dear fellow?"

While the voluble captain babbles on—he is as fond of talking over his battles as of fighting them, which is saying a good deal—Monsieur Bob's attention seems distracted, for he no longer meets Shackelford's eye, but allows his gaze to wander around the mosque, a fact which even the soldier is bound to notice.

"Good Heavens! Bob, what ails you? Bad news from home, man? No? Poor health? Never better? Well, bless you soul! There can be but one other explanation to the mystery. Bob Crane, you are in love, sir!"

The other does not deny the accusation, but gives a dreary little smile that fires the captain's very soul by the mystery of its significance.

"Great Cæsar! who would have believed it? You who have been through all the capitals of Europe and America, and met the beauties of the world—you who openly boasted in my presence that you had never seen the woman you would give a snap of your finger for—"

"Mercy Aleck!"

"You, Bob Crane, the bravest comrade in battle, the tenderest nurse in a sick camp—that you should come to this miserable town of Algiers to make a fool of yourself, and actually bow down before a woman! Well, that settles it. I was hunting for a *man*, but now I'm bound for Chili tomorrow. I wash my hands of you, Bob."

Evidently Captain Shackelford, old war dog that he is, can be classed as something of a woman-hater. He may admire, but his business in life is fighting, not making love.

"I hope you will reconsider that determination, Captain. I am in trouble. When I first caught sight of your welcome face my heart leaped for joy, as I thought heaven had been good and sent this old friend to my assistance. Now you dash all my hope to the ground by informing me that you are about to leave me in the lurch."

"God bless you, my boy! In that case I'll postpone my departure a while. If there is anything on the *tapis* whereby this old Arab town can be aroused, count Aleck Shackelford in."

At this Monsieur Bob is seized with a spasm of enthusiastic regard, and would clasp the brown hand of his soldier friend to express his emotions; but Shackelford has been there before, and dexterously avoids punishment by coolly folding his arms.

"That is just like you, old friend, generous and bold to a fault. You must hear my story at the earliest opportunity," mutters Bob.

"What is the matter with the present time? I never believe in procrastination. Come, let's retire to the court, and among the orange trees you can entertain me with the yarn. I only hope it is something beyond the ordinary, Bob."

He links his arm in that of his companion while thus speaking, but the other somehow seems loth to depart, a fact that immediately arouses the suspicion of the soldier, who can see little that is attractive in this place.

"Deuce take it, Bob, what holds you? One would think the old sheik yonder had won you over to be a follower of the prophet. Why d'ye look around with such uneasiness! Good Heavens! man, I can't endure a mystery; I'm a plain open fighter myself, and if you want my assistance the sooner you lift the veil you've thrown over this, like the *foutah* of a Moorish lady, the better for my peace of mind."

At this Monsieur Bob arouses himself; he gives one last look in the direction of the little group of foreigners, and then to the complete mystification of his comrade, groans.

"Come," thinks the doughty captain, as together they shuffle toward an exit, "this thing has gone deeper than I ever dreamed. Bob says he's in trouble. Poor devil! I never knew a man who wasn't, as soon as he fell in love. I wonder if the disease has gone too deep for a cure."

While the soldier thus meditates and endeavors to recall to mind some case of heroic treat ment that might be applied to Bob's condition, they pass out of the mosque, and resume their own footwear, kept by the Arab who rents the pointed slippers near the door.

The scene in the court is soothing; cool shadows lie under the orange trees; the splash of fountains murmurs in the air, and there is a delightful odor of flowers floating about. In the winter time the hills around Algiers are fairly covered with masses of nasturtiums and kindred plants, which grow wild, many of them exhaling a fragrance that is almost intoxicating in its powerful sweetness.

Shackelford endeavors to draw his companion away, but Bob will only go a short distance, and remains where he can watch the door of the mosque, through which the faithful will soon come pouring forth.

They lean against a white stone, a peculiar dome-like little structure such as can be seen in every Algerian cemetery, and occasionally in the court of a mosque; it is the tomb of a marabout, or saint, and is supposed to arouse feelings of great veneration in the minds of the people; but familiarity breeds contempt, and the reverence is given more to the living than to the dead saint.

"Now, my dear boy, let me hear the dreadful story. I suppose its the old tale with variations,—I came, I saw, I was conquered. Who is the guilty party? Where did you meet her? How did the witch cast her spell over you?"

Monsieur Bob is compelled to smile at the rough way in which the soldier would draw out his secret; no doubt if the circumstances demanded it, Captain Shackelford could extract teeth, but he would be a clumsy dentist.

"Softly, my fine fellow. Such stories are not told in a breath, you understand."

"Spare me any rhapsodies, Bob, I beg; I can imagine all that. Stick to stern facts, my boy, cold facts. They pay best. Now, there was that time a few years back when I accompanied the old Jew, Enoch ben Levi, from his lead mines of the Jebel Wanashrees across the plains and mountains to Fez. Facts were what saved my life, man. Our camel train was attacked by a troop of wild Bedouins from the interior; to make a long story short they took me prisoner and put me on the rack to answer questions; I told all I knew, and it pleased the sheik so that he made me his second in command. If I had lied—ugh! I often imagine how queer it would be to have my head hanging from the end of a long pike. But this isn't to the point. I came here to listen to an adventure, not to tell one. Speak up, friend Bob; tell me all about the capitulation."

* * *

Instead, the other half starts erect in alarm as the sonorous voice of the mufti floats from the interior of the mosque; he is again indulging in wild lamentations and beseeching the favor of Allah upon the prostrate host.

There can be no doubt but that Monsieur Bob has some secret cause for uneasiness; the soldier reads this much, but cannot for the life of him figure out the explanation. He, too, glances toward the exit. Does Monsieur Bob expect some fierce Arab chieftain—a hated rival perhaps—to come rushing forth in search of him, brandishing his yataghan as he prepares to make crow's meat of the infidel dog? This is the first thought that flies through the mind of Shackelford, and he is a trifle nervous about an encounter under the shadow of the mosque, knowing the nature of the Moors.

Strangely enough this idea is strengthened by what Bob says and does. Turning upon the soldier he suddenly asks:

"Are you armed, old fellow?"

The question almost takes the other's breath away, so that he stammers out:

"Well—er, yes—that is, I never go without a little pocket revolver. Twice it has saved my life. But why ask such a question, Bob? You surely don't mean to make war upon the people in yonder mosque! Why, we'd have the whole population of old Algiers up in arms in less than an hour. Good Heavens! man," as he sees by the look on Bob's drawn face that his shot has hit not far from the bull's-eye, "have you gone crazy?"

Monsieur Bob turns and looks his comrade squarely in the face for the first time, and it can be marked that there is an expression of deep anxiety akin to desperation about his eyes; he reminds Shackleford of a man almost driven to bay. When he speaks there is the trace of a sneer in his voice.

"I have always believed you the most reckless dare-devil of my acquaintance, Aleck, and yet you turn pale at the thought of meeting a few cowardly Arabs. There is no need of seeking the interior to find adventure—you can have all you want right here."

"The deuce you say," mutters the soldier.

"Although you profess to be a woman-hater, I have seen you defend a girl in Alexandria when an angry crowd wanted to kill her."

"Bah! that was nothing."

"It was the work of a noble heart; you don't hate womankind as much as you profess."

"Well, you see, I had a mother once, and—"

"I believe you would stand up in defense of a helpless girl again, Aleck Shackelford."

"No doubt of it, my dear boy, no doubt of it," uneasily.

"You may be put to the test sooner than you imagine, my friend:"

"Ah!" looking around, "I see no sign of the lovely female in distress, my Bob."

"You have been in Constantinople; tell me, have you seen women in the mosques there?"

"A strange question. I believe so, but don't remember; you see the Koran don't recognize that a woman has a soul. Besides, they do all their fine dressing at home, and look so ugly and heathenish on the street, with their faces veiled, that the poor creatures have no temptation to come out," comments the practical soldier.

"But here it is entirely different."

"Yes, I know. It is death to a woman to enter a mosque—I've heard that."

Monsieur Bob grits his teeth.

"What would you think of a girl who, in disguise, enters yonder mosque, determined to see for herself the strange things that take place there?"

Captain Shackelford starts.

"I should think she must be a little f— I mean," seeing the strange look on Bob's face, "that she is possessed of considerable grit. Look here, man, do you know any girl who has been so rash as that?"

Monsieur Bob shrugs his broad shoulders and groans.

"That is what Nina, the girl who has bewitched me, has done," he whispers hoarsely.

"Confusion take 'em," mutters the woman-hater, "here's another man gone wrong."

CHAPTER II.

DEATH TO THE WOMAN IN THE MOSQUE.

The soldier of fortune does not utter the words aloud, for he has a great respect for Bob Crane. This, however, does not prevent him from puckering his lips up, and emitting a peculiar little whistle.

"Bless my soul, old chap, I'm sorry for you."

"Sorry—for me? What in the deuce makes you say that, Shackelford?" demands Bob.

"A remark I'd make to any friend of mine who got into such hot water," returns the old veteran, with a sad smile.

"You miserable woman-hater! Well, the worst I can wish is that some day even you may experience the exquisite delights and keen torture of being in love."

"Heaven forbid! Sooner than that I'd invite an Arab to use his yataghan upon me. Now, in your case, it seems doubly sad, because you have evidently been bewitched by a girl of no ordinary caliber."

"You shall see her; then let me hear that you blame me. Nina is one in ten thousand. I've seen 'em all over the world, but never a girl who attracted me as she has done. Hark! what is that?"

"No occasion for alarm, my boy; it's only an Arab band passing down the street; you know the feast begins to-night, and Algiers will be like Bedlam let loose. Why, you're as nervous as a cat, Monsieur Bob!"

"That music is enough to scare one half to death," mutters the man from Chicago.

There are musicians with cymbals, triangles, and rude drums, flutes made from willow wands, and several instruments, the nature of which is beyond description, as must also be the sounds which emanate therefrom. Both the foreigners clap their hands to their ears until the procession passes in among the narrow streets of the old town on the hills.

"What a relief," cries Shackelford, when the instruments of torture are swallowed up in the walls of Algiers. "Now we can talk again. You can tell me all about this wonderful Nina. Does she know you are here watching over her, and ready to fight all the world if necessary?"

"No, I don't believe she suspects it. I learned the truth from her maid. There is much I cannot tell you now, Captain—much of mystery that will interest you later on. You have heard of Musta-el-Gaber?" and he pronounces the singular name in a low voice, as though afraid lest the orange trees have ears.

Shackelford moves a little uneasily, and looks into his companion's face as though he can hardly credit his hearing.

"What do you know of that terrible man, long the dread of every caravan in northern Africa? I hope he isn't mixed up in this affair?"

"That is just it. In good time you shall know all. Now you understand why I said I had need of your help."

"Well, I should think so. I've met Musta in the desert, and, to make a long story short, he's one of the few men I have no use for."

"They say he is no pure Arab."

"I believe his father was a Portuguese sailor; at any rate Musta is up in the languages. How does he come into this affair?"

"Patience, my friend; all in good time. Come, let us walk to that little knoll on the left. We can still watch the exit, and I have something to show you, a sight never to be forgotten."

They walk to the rise of ground indicated; here the trees no longer obstruct the view; the mosque is on one side, and over the lower part of Algiers the looker-on has a magnificent survey of the great sea, the undulating coast and the harbor before the city.

It is superb. Shackelford draws in a long breath as he gazes upon the blue Mediterranean,—rivaling the sky itself—the waving palms, the quaint Moorish houses on the hill-side, and the vessels in the harbor.

There are French and English men-of-war, trade steamers, coasting vessels, yachts, odd, picturesque Moorish craft, and small boats darting to and fro. Who could gaze upon such a scene without experiencing keen pleasure?

"Do you see anything there that takes your eye, Captain?" asks Monsieur Bob, presently.

"Well, if I am to be particular, there's the jauntiest, sauciest little craft I ever laid eyes on, anchored off the bight."

"Ah! yes; you'd like to cruise in her?

"Tempt me not, old chap; I haven't an idea who the owner may be. I'll admit though, it would be bliss to have a run in her."

Monsieur Bob bends forward and touches his companion on the arm. There is a peculiar smile upon his face that baffles the soldier.

"Give me your assistance, Shackelford, and, if we are successful, I promise you a long cruise in that dandy little yacht," he says.

"You, Bob! Does she belong to any one you know?"

"I never met her owner face to face, but I've often seen his counterfeit in a glass. He's a lazy dog, gifted with more than his share of this world's goods gained in lucky speculation in Chicago's wheat pit —"

"And they call him Monsieur Bob,—the best fellow abroad to-day; the truest friend, the most unassuming chap in the world."

"Where did you pick up that lovely little craft, my boy? She rests my eyes to look at her."

"Do you remember the Englishman we met down around the Pyramids? The queerest conglomeration of nonsense and bravery I ever saw in my life; a chap in a plaid suit of intense design, loud enough to make a monkey laugh, keeping a dozen angry Arabs at bay with his revolver, he smoking a cigar as cool as the devil, they jabbering like a lot of fiends, and clamoring for his blood."

"Oh! yes; the Honorable Felix Campertown; I shall never forget that strange chap with the appearance of a fool and the heart of a warrior. You bought the yacht from him?"

"Yes, when at Naples, little dreaming to what use I would put her ere three months went by. That yacht may yet be the key that will unlock this difficulty, and bring me victory. Captain, I am in a terrible mess, and I depend on you to help me out. This little difficulty is only one item in the whole affair, but you understand what terrible consequences might follow if these fanatical Mohammedans learned that one of the despised sex had dared to enter the sacred precincts of this particular mosque. I shall not breathe easy until she is home again."

The captain makes no remark upon the subject, but he does a heap of thinking. He has seen all manner of women in his time, but never, he mutely confesses, has he run across one who possessed courage enough to attempt such a strange and hazardous feat as this.

Somehow, his interest in the wonderful Nina who has carried the heart of Monsieur Bob by storm, is aroused, and he secretly confesses to a desire that he may soon see her, little realizing what strange scenes the future holds for Monsieur Bob and his friends.

One last sweeping glance Shackleford takes, and sets the picture in his mind forever, the little gold-kissed wavelets, the proud, grim war vessels, the jaunty yachts riding at anchor and above all the turquoise sky.

"They come out; let us draw nearer; this is the critical time," breathes Bob.

He does not even wait to see whether his companion follows, but hurries toward the exit through which the motley congregation can now be seen pouring.

As he nears the spot the heart of Monsieur Bob almost leaps into his throat, for there suddenly arises within the mosque loud shouts; pandemonium seems to have broken loose; men shriek and jabber in the wild Arab tongue; one mass seeks to push out, and those who have already sought the open air, filled with curiosity endeavor to get in again, which conflicting desires cause a blockade under the arch, where a swarm of Arabs, Moors and swarthy Kabyls push and tear and shout at the top of their lungs.

To poor Bob Crane there can be but one explanation of this fearful commotion—it has been discovered that a woman has invaded the sacred mosque, and defied the decrees of Allah, profaning his temple by her presence.

In imagination the desperate lover already sees his Nina, the rash cause of all this disturbance, surrounded by the mufti and his bigoted followers, eager to tear the fair girl to pieces, to bathe their keen cimeters and yataghans in her precious blood. The very thought sets the man's heart to beating like a trip-hammer; he darts upon the mass of human beings blocked at the doorway, but even his strength cannot force a passage through the serried ranks.

As one might toss nine-pins aside this furious Chicago giant seizes upon those nearest him and gives them a whirl, one with each hand.

Those assaulted go spinning around until they look like the whirling dervishes met with on the road to Mecca. Shackelford witnesses all this from the outskirts of the crowd. He stands there amazed, while Arab and mountaineer come spinning past. In spite of Bob's furious dexterity he seems no nearer a solution of the question; the vacuum is immediately filled up from the sides.

Then, to the further amazement of the veteran, he sees this aroused tiger kick off his shoes, spring up, seize upon the moulding of the heavy arch, and thus holding on actually walk over the heads of the dense pack that fills the doorway; they cannot move a hand to prevent him; in five seconds he has surmounted the difficulty and is inside the gorgeous temple.

Captain Aleck has already run to a slit of a window through which he pushes his head and shoulders; it will even be possible for him to pass into the mosque by this route if his presence is really needed.

One glance around tells him what has been the cause of all the uproar. The building has been threatened with fire; a lamp has exploded in some strange way, and, but for the presence of mind of the old mufti, whose energy is not confined to his prayers, it seems, the magnificent mosque, the finest outside of Stamboul, must have been destroyed.

This accounts for the alarm of those within, for fire is something the Arab fears; although the flames have been subdued, excitement still reigns within the temple.

While the veteran looks about, he is surprised to hear his name spoken. The slit in the thick wall is about six feet from the floor, and as he turns his head someone makes a motion.

It is Monsieur Bob.

He half supports the figure of one whom Captain Shackelford has taken for a Spanish student, wearing blue glasses and a soft hat; the glasses have been lost in the crush, and one glance the woman-hater has of a pair of liquid eyes that send a peculiar thrill to his hardened heart.

As yet in the excitement they do not appear to have attracted attention. The seeming student recovers and stands alone; Shackelford does not fail to note the blushes that chase along that olive neck.

"We must get out of here at once," says Bob in a low but terribly earnest voice; "I have heard several declare they could swear by Allah and his prophet that they caught a woman's scream at the time the flames flashed up. When the excitement subsides in a few minutes there may be an investigation. We must escape; at least she must, before then."

"Leave me, Monsieur Bob," breathes the softest, sweetest voice in the world.

"Never!" exclaims the American fiercely.

"My foolishness has brought this terrible evil about—it is justice that I should suffer, but why must you share my fate? You are brave, you are noble, but leave me!" she continues more anxious regarding his danger than her own peril.

"At least I am no coward, Senorita. You know why I will not leave you—why I will face this rabble of wolves if necessary, to defend you," he says in low tones that are rendered more thrilling by the strange scenes surrounding them.

She gives him one glance from the eyes that have before now made him her slave, and the captain hears her say half aloud:

"*Merci!* I really believe I am beginning to admire the awkward giant after all."

If Bob hears this aside he pays no attention to it. All of his thoughts seem to be concentrated upon the solution of the puzzle. Egress by means of the door is impossible, and by the time a passage has been cleared the janizaries of the mosque may be searching for the person who gave that involuntary feminine scream;

searching, with the desperate purpose of doing murder.

Alive to the emergency, determined to save a precious life, doubly precious to him, the tall Chicago pilgrim looks around eagerly, in the endeavor to find some loop-hole of escape. For himself he has not a single thought; true, his violent energy at the door of the sacred mosque must have made him enemies, but in the excitement such rude handling may be forgiven; at any rate he can stand their scowls, and keep his eyes about, should chance cause him to wander through the queer narrow lanes and arcades of the native part of Algiers, where a vengeful foe might lurk to deal a cowardly blow.

"She must be gotten out of here—but how can it be done? A blight on my stupid brain! Here is this miserable slit of a window, and a pair of strong arms beyond. Captain, you promised to help me—now is the time to keep your word. Hold out your arms, man."

His words are filled with authority; Shackelford is accustomed to giving orders, but in such an emergency he knocks under to Bob—Bob, who belies the name of a good-natured, lazy gawk, hardly knowing what to do with his hands when in the presence of the gentler sex—Bob, who is worth a whole regiment in an affair when desperate valor is needed.

This same ordinarily bashful worthy bends over the object of his adoration, the owner of those wonderful eyes that had had their glowing fire obscured by a pair of common blue sand-glasses; when he speaks there is no sign of hesitation in his voice, for it takes some such occasion like this, where danger menaces, to show Monsieur Bob at his best.

"You will pardon me, Nina—Senorita. This is no time for etiquette. Your life is in danger; you may be killed if you remain. There is one way to save you—through this window. Again I say, pardon me, but you must obey. Put your arm around my neck."

She hears; who could refuse when he speaks with such quiet authority? She does exactly what Monsieur Bob tells her. Then he raises her up. She is no shadow, but a substance of at least a hundred and thirty, and yet he lifts her as though she were a child. That is where those superb muscles that seem to be sleeping most of the time, come into play. Were she twice that weight Monsieur Bob would raise her to the slit in the wall, and think nothing of it. Awkward he may be as a lover, but at such a time as this the slumbering giant within awakens and transforms him into a god among men. Who else would do and dare thus for her?

She gives him one dazzling smile that causes his heart to expand until he fears it must burst; then the captain has hold of the extended hand—a quick spring, and she has reached the embrasure.

There is plenty of room for her to pass, and as Monsieur Bob realizes that she has gone, he turns his attention to the still excited and demonstrative followers of Mohammed.

One thing he sincerely hopes—that no one has paid any particular attention to the scene occuring at the window. Others in the sudden excitement have made use of different slits in the wall, in order to escape, so there was nothing out of the way in what he has done.

The excitement grows apace, for the tremendous voice of the old priest or mufti has bellowed out certain facts, following with quotations from the Koran respecting the sanctity of the temple.

Every one is now engaged in scanning the faces of his neighbors eagerly, while all of the foreigners come in for a close survey. The voice of the sheik urges them on. They must discover the person who gave vent to that feminine shriek when the flames went up. So earnest is the search that many have drawn weapons, and if an unfortunate female is discovered these successors to the terrible janizaries who used to guard the Kasbah, their ancient citidel, now used as a barrack by the

French zouaves, will speedily dye their keen-edged knives and swords in her unholy blood.

Monsieur Bob breathes easy now, since he has faith in Shackelford, and has heard no outcry that would indicate trouble outside. He pictures the old woman-hater accompanying Nina to her home; they must first pass through the lanes and shaded streets of old Algiers, and inwardly the man from Chicago chafes because fate does not allow him the privilege of being her escort.

It may be just as well; to him belongs the credit of saving the indiscreet girl who has awakened the religious wrath of this fierce congregation. True, it is only a little thing, and Monsieur Bob cannot imagine how he could do otherwise; but he knows that Nina's feelings toward him have changed, and remembering the fruitless siege he has laid to her heart in the past, he glows with pleasure to think that fortune has finally given him a show.

Leaning against the wall he watches the bustle, hears the many questions, and notes the fact that the fruitless search enrages the people. They act more like furious wolves than men, and the foreigners, who fail to understand what all this affair is about, huddle together as would a herd of sheep, wondering if their lives are to be sacrificed forsooth, because a lamp chooses to explode in the mosque, and hoping the French troops from the Kasbah may appear upon the scene ere it is too late.

A hand touches the arm of the tall Chicagoan, and, turning, he sees an Arab wearing turban and *bournous*. Somehow the dark face with its moustache and goatee rivets his attention; this is no ordinary Bedouin of the desert, but a man whose name is carved upon the recent history of Algeria, and for years has been a terror to all travelers of the interior.

Monsieur Bob recognizes him at a glance, and meets his stare with one of equal ferocity.

"Ah! you have come to Algiers, Musta-el-Gaber,—you the burning brand of the desert? This is a dangerous locality for you. If I were to whisper the news to the French general there would be a public execution at sunrise on the Place du Gouvernment."

The dark-skinned scourge of Algeria smiles, and electrifies the American by saying:

"Monsieur Bob forgets; the life of the girl he loves is in my hands. I saw you help her to escape. If the truth is known, all the Frenchmen in Algiers could not save her. Now, let Monsieur Bob proclaim from the house tops that Musta-el-Gaber is in town!"

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR BOB'S DOUBLE WARNING.

Monsieur Bob realizes that he is rendered powerless by such a cunning foe. His hands are tied, since Musta-el-Gaber holds the key to the situation.

"It was a very fine piece of business, and reflects credit upon Monsieur Bob, but if I was to proclaim what I know here and now, you would have to fight for your life, and she—you know an Arab never forgets an injury against his religion—she would surely die."

The man speaks in his ear so that no other person can hear, and yet it seems to Bob the information is conveyed in thunder tones. He stares around, fearful lest the terrible old mufti has heard; the man chances to be looking directly at him just then.

Does he already suspect?

"You may be sure I will keep your secret then, for her sake; but if harm comes to her through you, the desert will not be large enough to hide a man of your size. You hear me, Musta-el-Gaber?

He drops his hand on the other's shoulder, and the fellow cringes under the fierce grip.

Then, without waiting for a reply, Bob turns and leaves him. He strides over to the little foreign contingent, huddled together like a lot of sheep, wanting a leader. The fierce Arabs and Kabyls scowl upon them and jabber in their peculiar tongue, as though about to murder the whole pack.

Monsieur Bob's coming puts new life into the party; he has the appearance of a leader, one upon whom they can depend. In his hand he already holds a revolver.

"Gentleman," he says, in a voice that is plainly heard above the racket, "we have to get out of this place, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must; but we are going out, mark that. How many of you are armed?"

Although the French hold Algiers, and the foreign residents about equal the natives in numbers, it is considered folly for any one to wander about this region without some means of defense. From time to time bold robberies are committed, and the cadi, or Moorish judge, is apt to deal lightly with an offender when the victim is a foreigner. O course, if the case reaches the French courts justice is done.

It does not surprise Bob in the least when every man present, English, French, German and Spanish, draws a weapon.

There are nine of them, all told, and thus armed they present quite a sturdy appearance. The Arabs fall back, still chattering like monkeys.

"Follow me, gentlemen. We'll force a passage, if necessary, through the doorway."

They advance, and as the exit is reached those who still fill it fall back in dismay, not exactly liking the looks of this determined band, with the warlike man at their head. Since Monsieur Bob has been fully aroused he does not bear much resemblance to the man known among his friends by that name; his clumsiness has vanished, and surely one could not apply the name of Sir Laziness to him now.

Thus they pass outside, where foot-gear is hurriedly resumed, and the foreigners, still keeping pretty well together, pass along to the new part of the city, where they are safe.

Bob has more trouble than the rest about finding his shoes, since they are not in charge of the custodian at the door of the temple; for it will be remembered he kicked them off when about to clamber over the mass of men jammed in the doorway, more because he could climb better without such impedimenta than that he considered the respect due to the sacred carpet.

The missing shoe is finally discovered in the possession of an Arab, who smilingly returns it and receives a franc. Thus Bob is fixed, and can depart.

It is high time, since all of his companions are gone, and he finds himself the scowled-upon center of observation. Little he cares for that, but walks toward the exit of the court, with a careless swing.

No one attempts to stay him, though several heads are yet dizzy from the awful spin which his strong arm gave them. He is perfectly aware of the fact that he is followed, even without turning his head. Bob treats these fellows about as a lordly lion would the snapping jackals at his heels; let him once turn his head, and they slink out of sight.

His thoughts are of Nina, and yet, much as he would give to see her, he dares not proceed thither for fear lest these spies suspect something of the truth.

He walks through the old town. The afternoon is still young, and as the end of the great fast approaches, the Mohammedans show signs of the coming season of mirth.

Not that even the most religious among them suffer during these thirty days. It goes without saying that the whole affair is a humbug. By day they fast and attend their mosque, but no sooner does the garrison gun indicate sunset than they hasten to their homes, where a fine dinner has been gotten in readiness, feast themselves, and pass the evening in any favorite amusement; the cloak of religion is thrown off until sunrise.

Monsieur Bob looks about him with languid interest, and yet the scene is one that must often come up again in his mind; around him lie the gloomy walls of old Al Jezira with their small holes for windows; here and there he sees Kabyl women bearing burdens on their heads,—veiled Moorish ladies carrying an air of intense mystery with them, and yet willing to slyly flirt with the tall foreigner—turbaned Arabs in slippered feet, astride of donkeys of such small size that the rider can almost touch the ground on either side,—little shelf-like shops where the Moorish proprietor sits cross-legged among his curios, calmly smoking while waiting for trade, always contented and ready to exclaim: "Kismet! It is fate!"

Looking from this strange quarter Bob can see the lower town with its bustle; a tramway and horse cars run to Mustapha, the beautiful foreign suburb on the hill; omnibuses to the Arab village of Birkadeen, and at this hour swarms of foreigners, Moorish and Jewish merchants,—yes, and native Arab traders, are on their way home.

Beyond lies the beautiful harbor, with its vessels flying the flags of all nations. It is very hard to believe that only two generations ago the city of Algiers was a hot-bed of pirates; that strings of Christian prisoners worked upon the jetties in the harbor; that in the lovely homes upon the hill Mustapha dwelt the original pirate owners, sighting their prey from afar; and that at one time more than twenty thousand European prisoners were held here, subject to the caprice of the arrogant Dey. It was our navy that gave the Algerian pirates their first drubbing, and, thanks to the French, all that terror has become a thing of the past.

The names of these old pirates can still be seen in letters of gold upon the posts leading to many of the Moorish dwellings on the hill, now transformed into sunny homes for the foreign residents; and the halls and courts, that once wore an air of dark tragedy and mystery, echo to-day with the merry shouts of English or French children.

Thank Heaven for that!

As Monsieur Bob walks in the direction of Mustapha Superieur, he sees another sight that is decidedly oriental.

A bric-a-brac merchant has spread out his stock upon one of the terraces, while the ladies look over his wares,—perhaps to admire, it may be to purchase. The lazy follower of Mohammed sits there smoking a cigarette and idly thrumming on a mandolin, as though he is hired by the hour to kill time, and has not the least interest in a sale. Perhaps a close observer might notice that much of this carelessness is assumed, for he slyly watches the English ladies out of the corner of his eyes. His stock in trade has been spread out in a showy and artistic manner; it rivets attention, the rich, warm colors lending a setting to the scene, of which the cross-legged Arab and his mandolin appear to occupy an important niche.

Here are embroideries of Tunis and Algiers, rich enough to make any lady covetous; carpets or rugs from Zanzibar that feel like eiderdown under the slippered feet; Kabyl haiks and jewelry for keepsakes, as are also the spears of the desert Bedouin, elegant wares from Damascus, and various trinkets gleaned from the four quarters of the globe.

"Heavens! If I could only photograph that scene," mutters Monsieur Bob, pausing, his artistic spirit aroused by the soft blending of colors, and the strange contrast between the white-skinned English ladies with the dark, turbaned Arab. "It seems to me I've met this chap before; if he'd only raise his head I could tell in a second; but what of that? Ah! he looks this way—he starts—he beckons. Bless my soul if it isn't Abdul Medshid!"

This looks as though the Arab trader and the tall Chicagoan have met before.

As he advances, the old merchant rises to his feet, and, placing his hands across his breast, solemnly bows; but Monsieur Bob is not satisfied with this cold Arabic salutation; he makes the other come to terms and shake hands in the civilized way, though the dark-skinned merchant mentally groans as he extracts his aching digits from the warm clutch of the impulsive giant.

Abdul Medshid can talk good English, for he has spent many years among the soldiers of the queen of Cairo in Egypt. This man has seen much of the world, and Monsieur Bob has at some time in the past had the good fortune to place him under heavy obligations. The Arab or Moor never forgets a favor; in this he is like our American Indian; indeed, there are many points of resemblance between them.

"I had heard you were here," says the Arab merchant, quickly.

"How was that?" asks Bob.

"It was Zella who saw you."

Bob remembers the beauty of Abdul's child; he can picture her as last he saw her, laden with precious stones, dressed in the richest silks of the world, and adorning her father's house like a princess, for this merchant is in truth immensely wealthy; one would not perhaps believe it to see him thus vending his wares, but the old man is shrewd, and he undoubtedly has an object in all he does, though that object is not always seen.

"Zella saw me and failed to speak? I can hardly believe she would treat an old friend so poorly," exclaims Monsieur Bob.

The merchant looks around him; the English ladies are some distance away, examining a piece of exquisite embroidery, though casting side glances toward the manly-looking stranger. Abdul Medshid had a look of trouble on his face, generally so devoid of expression, and this is so plain that even Bob notices it.

"You forget, Monsieur, that the ladies of our race are bound by social customs as with fetters of steel. Should the wife or daughter of a Moor be seen talking with a Christian on the public streets, or showing the whole of her face to view, she would not only be ostracised —something even worse might occur."

"Your pardon, Abdul. I should have thought of that. It was foolish of me," says Bob quickly.

"Besides," continues the merchant, steadily, "she could not give you even a sign, for at the time she chanced to be in company with one who hates all Christians in general, and I believe Monsieur Bob in particular."

"Your words set me to thinking. I know of but one person that such a description would apply to. You mean Musta-el-Gaber."

"That is true, Monsieur Bob. That man means you ill—he seeks your downfall."

"That I am aware of, but I mean to baffle him. I can depend upon my good arm, friend. It has carried me through more trying scenes."

"Great is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet! Monsieur Bob, I know you of old; I have seen you fight, and I believe you can look out for Number One under ordinary cases. But just now there is a terrible web being woven around you, and I fear for your life."

Naturally, Bob is rather interested, but he does not show the concern that bespeaks fear.

"Tell me about this, my friend; perhaps I have already an idea of what the truth may be," he says in a calm voice.

But Abdul Medshid shakes his head.

"There is no place in Algiers where the walls have not ears save in a man's own house. Come and see us when the sun has gone; Zella will be glad. Listen, my friend. I have found out where you stop, at the hotel in the foreign quarter, when not on board of your yacht. When you arrive at your room you will find there a note with my name. It says, after giving directions where to find my abode: 'Come after dark this evening—as an Arab if you can. I have much to tell you; danger flies around; your life is foresworn; come surely.' Thus you see we do not forget, Zella and Abdul. We would return the debt we owe Monsieur Bob."

"I will come; you shall tell me. Perhaps this is the very chance I have been looking for, to clear up several mysteries that bother me. You say the directions are on the paper?"

"Take them down again, to be sure, Monsieur," and Bob writes as the other speaks.

"Pass up the Rue de l'Arabe until you reach the third arch, which has a white stone and an inscription in Arabic."

"I know it well," interrupts Bob.

"The second door on the right is mine. It has a bell, and not a brass knocker like the rest. When the door is opened only say 'Monsieur Bob.' That will be the password to my house this night, and only he can enter who has it."

"A thousand thanks, my friend. What a strange meeting this has been."

"Kismet! it is fate, Monsieur," returns the old merchant, holding up his hands in a dramatic way; and then the furtive glance he casts in the direction of the white Arab houses proclaims that he is anxious that Bob take his departure, as he does not wish to be seen talking with one who is already known in certain classes as a "marked man."

Under these circumstances Bob cannot well remain; at any rate he looks forward to the evening visit to lift the veil of mystery. So he bids the merchant farewell. Abdul feigns to bow so humbly that it is impossible for him to see the extended hand, at which the ruffian of a Bob grins, remembering that he did put a little warmth in his greeting, bows in return and turns away, followed by the eyes of the English ladies, one of whom seems to know him, by sight at any rate, as she mentions his name and points to where the dandy yacht rides at anchor in the beautiful bay of Algiers.

He walks on, pondering over what has so recently occurred, and endeavoring to put certain facts together, so as to render the fabric complete. A strange life it is one can lead in this same city of Algiers; in the very midst of modern society, gay garrison balls, theaters and all that pertains to the present age, it needs but a step into the old Moorish quarter, with its narrow lanes ascending the hill and the giant walled-in houses toppling toward each other so that in places their roofs actually touch, to take one back at least a century, for surely these houses were exactly like this then, and the inhabitants dressed and acted just as they do now.

There must always hover over this scene a halo of mystery; it is a part of the Moorish nature, and will probably never be removed.

Monsieur Bob notes that the golden orb of day is dropping rapidly in the direction of the hills that mark the western horizon. It has been a glorious winter's day, such as people have come from chilly England and France to enjoy; for the invalid fears no harsh winds in this country favored by the gods for a winter residence, far above Nice on the Mediterranean, more than five hundred miles north. The difference lies in the fact that Algiers is south of the great inland sea, and no chilly air can sweep across from the lands of ice and snow.

Taking one last glance in the direction of the harbor, to see that his yacht is apparently all right, Monsieur Bob heads for the hotel. He has perfected his plans for the immediate present, and knows of a bazar where he can, while on his way thither, purchase all the articles needed for his disguise, fancy boots with red or yellow tops, such as the better class of natives wear, bournous and anything else he may fancy.

It is nearly sunset, and soon the voice of the *muezzin* will be heard from his tower calling the faithful to prayer.

Monsieur Bob makes his purchases, which cost him numerous *duros*, for the dealer always sticks it on to rich foreigners, and receives a queer-shaped bundle in exchange, which he is to carry to his hotel.

Just as he quits the Arab bazar he sights a well-known face in the entrance to the hotel down the street. It is Captain Shackelford; his countenance betokens anxiety as he looks up and down the street.

"*Bon soir, capitaine!*" exclaims Bob, suddenly appearing before him, at which the veteran gives a tremendous start, and smiles blandly, while blind to the extended hand.

"Thank Heaven, you are here safe and sound, Bob, my boy! I began to fear those accursed bigots at the mosque might have done you up and made a premature job of it," and his voice declares the warmth of his feelings, even if he does refuse to shake hands with the Chicago bear.

"Why are you here, looking so anxious, Aleck? You know me well enough to believe I could take care of myself in that crowd."

"It wasn't that. Luck has been with me, my friend, and since leaving you I have learned comething that will interest you—perhaps make your hair stand on end with dismay."

His voice is low and very mysterious, but Bob simply raises a hand and pulls his tourist hat more firmly over his brow.

"I reckon that will prevent it. Now suppose you spin the yarn, Shackelford, my dear boy."

"Not while that beastly Arab watches us, down the street. Take me to your room and hear the awful tale."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARAB CONJURER.

It is certain that Shackelford has learned something concerning Bob's fortunes, and the young American shows an eagerness to hear what it may be. When last seen, it will be remembered that the doughty captain was in the company of the girl whose eyes have made such havoc with Bob Crane's heart, so that his anxiety is perfectly natural.

The other's manner is very mysterious, and he even speaks of an Arab spy watching them from some place along the square.

Bob's hotel is situated upon the *Place du Gouvernement*, near the shadow of a mosque, but now the principle square in new Algiers. It is crowded with people, four-fifths of whom are foreigners, and quite a number of handsome ladies can be seen in their carriages. Here cafés, *magasins de nouveautes* and little bazars abound; around this section the bustling business centers, and yet here the foreign element take their idle stroll also.

The cause is not hard to find. In this center gather all the elements that make Algiers one of the most delightfully cosmopolitan cities of the world; here the observer notes people of almost every race under the sun, each in his national costume, so that the scene on a sunny winter's afternoon is one never to be forgotten.

Besides, there is the music; the French military band discourses delightful airs, and the pulses quicken when even Yankee Doodle or the Star Spangled Banner rolls out, for there are numerous Americans in town, and the band leader knows how to make friends.

Not far away is the *Kasbah* once the ancient citidel of the notorious janizaries, who made a Dey, or ruler for Algiers one morning, and, within twenty-four hours, had his head dangling from one of the old city gates known as *Bab Azoun* and *Babel Oned.* Here are the barracks for the French soldiers, and the place that once knew the plottings of the dark-skinned conspirators now resounds to the laughter of zouaves, while the halls echo with stirring music and the patter of many feet as the garrison balls take place.

Truly, Algiers has seen wonderful changes, and these walls that now echo with pleasure could tell terrible tales were they gifted with the power of speech.

Surrounded by such a scene of gaity, it is no wonder that Shackelford desires to seek some more quiet nook in order to speak. This is certainly no place for a serious conversation, and his manner proclaims that he has something to communicate that is not of the most cheerful nature in the world.

So Monsieur Bob leads him into the caravansary. It is a French hotel, run by a Gaul, and much superior to many places on the continent where Bob has paid a large sum for mighty poor equivalents. He has no fault to find with his quarters; it would be hard for this pilgrim to complain anyway; he is so good natured, and has roughed it all around the world so long, sleeping in such tough places, that he has grown to be very unconcerned about trifles.

Who can say what his thoughts may be as he leads the captain to his den? Nina is in his mind; at the same time he has a confused recollection of others—Zella, the child of Abdul Medshid, with her face of entrancing lovliness, and Musta-el-Gaber, the dreaded pirate of the desert come before him, as though they have a share in this puzzle which the man from Chicago must soon solve, the penalty of a failure meaning possibly death.

Strange elements are working against him in this wonderful Moorish town, and if he gains a decisive victory over them it will be through pure Yankee pluck, the quality that never gives up, that has made us a nation, and will one day place us ahead of all others in the world.

They reach his room at last, and Bob, finding it dusky therein, throws open the blinds that have kept the sun's glare out.

A beautiful view flashes before them, for as the hotel commands a view over the lower houses, the blue sea is in sight. There lie the shipping-steamers and sailing vessels of all nations, some with their canvas spread as though about to take advantage of the favorable evening breeze.

It is worth looking at, this sight, but Captain Shackelford's eyes are at once riveted upon a cloud of smoke just seen around the point of land to the east.

"Yonder goes the mail steamer for Phillippeville, Bona and Tunis. I would to Heaven we were all safely aboard of her," he says, warmly, at which Monsieur Bob looks keenly at him and wonders what could have occurred to cause this old fire-eater such uneasiness.

"Come, my friend, you look for amusement. Now that it is coming it sounds strange to hear you talk of flight. I am amazed!"

Shackelford smiles grimly, as he turns his grizzled head and shows his white teeth.

"I was thinking, not of myself, but of that lovely creature you rescued from the fury of the fiends in the mosque," he returns.

At this Monsieur Bob chuckles.

"I thought as much. Talk about your heart being cast iron; why, bless you, it is as tender as a spring chicken's! One melting glance from Nina's eyes, the touch of her hand on your arm, has brought about a revolution. Our woman-hater is conquered. Good! He will not be so severe on me from this time forward."

"Nonsense!" says the veteran.

"Good Heavens! He blushes! This severe anchorite, this hater of the gentler sex! Really, the time may come when you and I, Captain, may look at each other over leveled revolvers. We may be rivals, but I warn you in advance I will brook no interference. He scowls; my soul! an arrow has already pierced his stony old heart. We shall soon have him spouting Tennyson, or perhaps writing verses himself, who knows?" and Bob laughs cheerily as he pokes the veteran slyly in the ribs.

"Have your fun, Bob, my boy. You may not feel so much like laughing when you have heard my story," returns Shackelford.

"Is it so serious as that, my friend? Here, take a weed and make yourself comfortable while you spin the yarn."

The soldier of fortune selects a fine cigar from the box held out to him, lights it, and then draws a chair near the window, where he can look out occasionally upon the harbor, or the square below, with its moving crowds.

There is a certain flavor of dramatic force in all he does, for Shackelford loves to invest everything with a spicy flavor. It is the nature of the man. As for Bob he walks up and down the room as though endeavoring to work off some superfluous steam.

"Proceed, old chap," he says.

"Well, let us go back to where you can get a good hold—the window in the wall of the mosque. When I had drawn that venturesome girl through and we were once more under the shade of the orange trees, I knew that haste was a factor in the game just then.

"Take my word for it, I hated to leave you there, Bob, my boy, but I knew you would never forgive me if I failed to get the girl away, so you see there was no choice."

"Of course not," mutters the other, pausing to glance out of the window, as some movement on board his yacht catches his quick eye. "They're lowering a boat—Paxton's coming a shore. Perhaps he wants to see me."

"Who the deuce is Paxton?"

"My captain; picked him up in Naples, and a deuced smart man, too."

"Ah! yes," with a peculiar look at Bob,

"what of your crew; is it the same our Englishman had—sturdy British tars?"

"That's a deuced strange question to ask me in the midst of your yarn."

"Answer me. It may yet have a bearing on the story I'm about to spin, man," says the veteran with astonishing vigor.

"Oh! if that's the case, its easily done. Part of the crew remained. The balance I had to make up as best I could, but they are all good men if kept away from liquor. I pay an extra price, and no shore days allowed."

"I see. Well, we must go back again. If there's danger that Paxton may interrupt us I'll condense as much as I can."

"He can wait," says Bob resuming his walk.

"Knowing my duty, I hurried out of the grounds of the mosque. I would have assisted the fair Nina, but that would have looked suspicious. She kept her head down so that I couldn't see her face.

"Where we were to go I hadn't an idea, so mustering my French I said:

"'If Mademoiselle knows the way home she must be the guide,' and heard her reply:

"'Certainly, Monsieur.'

"We passed through Arab town, along some of those narrow streets where it always seems to me assassins must be lurking, but there was nothing to disturb us, and finally we drew near the foreign quarter.

"I noticed that Ma'm'selle Nina began to appear very nervous, and could readily imagine the cause, for the situation was singular enough.

"As we were now safe, and she must be near home, I thought it might be wise for me to say *au revoir*, and relieve her of my presence.

"While in the act of so doing, she looked up at me for the first time, and—deuce take it, Bob, as you say, those eyes are enough to melt a heart of stone—I stammered like a wretch of a school boy, and she seemed to regain her self-possession as I lost mine.

"'You are *his* friend?' she said quickly.

"I assured her that I was your shadow, your inseparable; it seemed to me just then I could not get too close to you if I was going to catch some of your reflected light."

"Oh! you villain! I see I shall yet have to stand you up and puncture you with a thirty-eight bit of lead. But never mind me; go on; what else did she say?"

Talk about your eager lovers! This man shows his nervousness in every movement. Cool and collected he can be in times of great peril, but under such circumstances as these he is only human, and looks savagely at the deliberate captain, as though almost ready to pounce upon him, and with a shake cause his tongue to wag faster.

Shackelford blows a blue wreath up into the air, and watches it whirl out of the window into the great expanse beyond. The tantalizing monster knows what agony racks Bob's heart, but it does not cause him to hasten one bit.

"At my assurance, this angel in disguise lays one hand on my arm, and I cannot help noticing what a soft, plump little member it is; she still magnetizes me with those deuced bright eyes, and wraps me around her finger, metaphorically speaking."

Bob grins wickedly, but the captain is looking aloft at the blue sky, which he can see as he lies back in his easy chair at the window.

"'Tell me,' she says in a thrilling whisper, 'tell me, will they hurt him,—that awkward, foolish, but oh, so brave Monsieur Bob,—the man who lifted me as though I were a child, and saved me from the awful result of my silly action,—will he suffer for that?'

"Well, I had the greatest notion in the world to tell her you were dead sure to be chopped to pieces by the *yataghan* tribe; that already the chances were ten to one they had made mince meat out of one Bob Crane of Chicago, and that she must think of him no longer, but let her gratitude go out to the living; but confound the luck, when those eyes held me I couldn't tell a lie to save my neck, Bob!

"I assured her you were able to look out for yourself, and would see her in good time, which seemed to please the darling immensely, for she blushed like a rose.

"Then she begged me not to breathe a word of this escapade to a living soul, wondered how the adorable Bob ever learned of her intention, pointed out the fine house where she lived, invited me to call,—*with* you, mind,—and then left me standing there, not quite certain whether I was Aleck Shackelford, the woman-hater of old, or a new species of fool just hatched out."

At this Bob roars.

"Upon my soul, that 's the richest joke of the season. The lion's claws are clipped, and by a pair of bright eyes. Now that I think of it, perhaps Zella can effect a radical cure. Since I am captured, it might be well to make it a double."

"Who the deuce is Zella?" grumbles Aleck.

"You shall see—ah! there is beauty to carry your old flinty heart by storm. Zella you shall know, and if you pass that siege unscathed, I shall disown you as a hopeless vagabond."

"But I am not through yet."

"No?" with eagerness.

"Great Scott! man, the best is to come. You think the interest wanes because the fair Nina has left the stage. Listen, then. I said I was rooted to the spot for a minute, and looked after the girl. She reached a wall; there was a door in it which she unlocked; then turning, she blew me a kiss,—of course meant for you, friend Bob,—and vanished from view.

"I looked at my watch. No use returning to the mosque, for by this time I knew they had either cut you up into small pieces, or else you were gone.

"So I sauntered down town, thinking I would take supper with you at your hotel"—

"Consider yourself engaged, old chap."

"—and relate my adventures. While walking along I came upon a fakir doing some nice tricks, and stopped to see if he could equal the chap we had a row with in Alexandria. Bless my soul, Bob, it was the same fellow!"

"Thunder and Mars! Achmed in Algiers! Another complication!"

"He did n't seem to recognize me, and as I stood there I wondered whether his coming to Algiers had anything to do with you. Then I heard my name called, and looked up to see a head and a pair of arms thrust from a cab that had come to a stop on the street, the arms waving like flails at work."

"That was the Honorable Felix," says Bob grimly.

"Campertown it was, and no other. I was deuced glad to see the little chap, and went out to take his hand and have a few words with him. His tongue was oiled and began work at once:

"'Just looking for you; heard you were in town; tried to see that erratic Monsieur Bob; knew nothing of him at the hotel; Jove! began to despair; dumb horror creeping up my spinal column; feared I might be too late. Jump in, Shackelford; talk as we ride.'

"That is the way he rattled on in a way you can readily understand. Enough was said to tell me he knew something that would interest you, and hence, without delay I tumbled in beside him.

"We rode on; what with the rattle of the cab, the bumping I received, and Milord's queer voice, it would not be surprising if I missed some of the words he dropped, but all the same I gathered enough to learn that your life is in danger again."

The other grunts in reply, and takes it all so coolly that Shackelford feels his old admiration for Monsieur Bob rising again.

"You don't take on as if you were scared. Bless me, Campertown showed more of the horrors than you give any evidence of," he remarks, taking his cigar between his finger and thumb, dexterously flipping the ashes off with his little finger like an adept, and surveying Bob from head to foot as he stands there.

"Perhaps it's because *he* knew the whole story," remarks Bob, significantly.

"That's so. Let me dig it out now. My suspicion connected with that beast of an Arab conjuror Achmed, was close to the bulls-eye."

"See here, was that him you mentioned as being down the street?"

"Yes, and he stands in front of the bazar yet; look and see for yourself."

"Confound the dark-skinned rascal; it's even so. He's really after me, then?"

"After you, old chap? Yes, with a vengeance. He's sworn to do you up; he has money, too, and an ordinary revenge don't satisfy him. The scoundrel has captured your yacht."

"What! I was on board this morning; he would not dare attempt such a thing in broad daylight, and right under the guns of the *Wasp*. If it was at night, now, I could give the story some credence, for these Arab dogs are as cunning as the deuce. Come, Captain, you're a little far-fetched."

"Am I?" says Shackelford with a queer smile, and a stubborn shake of the head; "just wait and see. The longest way around is often the quickest way to the fire. There are more tricks in this world, my lad, than ever entered into your philosophy. You are honest and an open fighter yourself, so that you're a poor hand at guessing the knavery of others."

"Knavery! Then he's up to ugly business?"

"Why, of course. Figs don't grow on thistles. You wouldn't expect a man like Achmed to work openly for your downfall. Instead, he will call to his aid all the evil spirits he can conjure up, and take you unawares. How many men have you on the yacht?"

"Let us see; seventeen, counting Paxton."

"Exactly. Well, ten out of that number have been bought, body and soul, by your enemy."

"Confusion!"

"Paxton is a devil, hiding his real nature under a bluff manner. He means to secretly ship this Achmed on board before you sail. At a given time they will make you a prisoner; a landing will be made on the coast of Italy between Naples and old Pompeii, near Vesuvius, now in a troubled state. Hark! my dear boy; this demon of an Arab conjurer has sworn a mighty oath by Mohammed, to cast you into the burning lake of lava that boils within the crater of the volcano!"

He pauses to note the effect.

The intelligence is horrible, and Bob might be excused for showing signs of emotion, but he is all nerve, and beyond a low laugh gives no evidence of his feelings.

"That's a jolly piece of news; rather warm, indeed. So that's the kind of man Paxton is! I'll have it out of him, some day," he says.

"Surely you do n't mean to embark with that crew, knowing this?"

"Surely, I do. Then the fun will begin. I may take a notion to turn the tables, and let old Achmed see how a bath goes in the crater."

"Bob, you must have injured that man terribly."

"On my honor I have not, Aleck. It is a sad story, though, and I take no pleasure in speaking of it. You remember he had a child?"

"Yes, quite a pretty girl,—Marhara was her name."

"I saw her frequently; I swear no word of love ever passed my lips; she was like a tigress, and told me I belonged to her; that she would die if I went away. I was mortified, angry. You remember, we left Alexandria hurriedly. I never told you why. It was to escape the importunities of Achmed and his daughter."

"Well?"

"I have since heard she kept her word."

"What! Killed herself?"

"She disappeared, and was believed to have cast herself into the Nile."

"Poor thing. That would account for his terrible feeling toward you."

"True, Aleck, but as Heaven is my judge I am as innocent as you. I never breathed a word of love to that child. It was an unfortunate affair; that is all I can say."

"I believe you, Bob; I never knew you to tell an untruth. These things will crop up now and then in a lifetime. I've had 'em myself—old iron-clad woman-hater Aleck Shackelford."

"But did Campertown tell you how he came to know of this little picnic in store for me?" resumed Monsieur.

"One of the English sailors chanced to overhear the whole plot. Campertown, thinking you were on board, went out to see you after dinner, when this fellow—he called him John Burrows, I believe—got a chance to slip a paper in his hand, which told the story. He meant to give it to you when you came aboard, or failing that, to swim ashore after dark."

"I shall remember John Burrows, and I'm a thousand times obliged to our mutual friend Campertown. Such a thing draws men closer together. Why, I actually love that Englishman, with his loud clothes, eye-glass, Dundreary drawl and all. I'll take him to my heart the next time we meet, I declare."

"Don't, Bob, I beg. He'll fall to pieces in your grasp, he's so wonderfully made up. But see here, do you mean to tell me you won't put these chaps under arrest here?"

"Not an arrest."

"And you will tempt Providence by sailing with such devils aboard your craft?"

"Providence is kind; I have you for a comrade. Confound the whole dozen conspirators! We can wipe the deck with them, counting in the seven English tars. Who knows but what the Honorable Felix may sail with us."

"That settles it then; if he goes the mutineers have a poor show. One look from Campertown in a towering rage will freeze their blood. Yes, you are right, my boy, the Honorable Felix is worth a regiment to scare the foe," and with a dry chuckle at the thought of seeing the little Dundreary dandy strike an attitude, Shackleford rises to his feet to go.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBLE FACED.

Just at this moment the boom of a sunset gun announces that the day is done. It does more, for it tells hosts of the faithful that once again the fast of Ramadan has become a thing of the past, and that they may begin the annual feast.

The flag comes down from the tall pole; soon darkness will settle upon Algiers, for in this warm country there is little twilight.

"You are not going, Captain? Remember your promise to dine with me. Besides, man, I have a little story to tell you," says Bob.

"In that case I remain. But when *he* calls—"

"You mean Paxton? I'll have him up so you can examine the monster. Not a hint of the truth though, my friend. I prefer to manage that business in my own way."

"And you shall, Bob, you shall. I have faith to believe that if once we leave this city with its dark-skinned plotters behind, you will be able to master those on the yacht."

"I imagine you suspect something of the truth, man," cries Bob, clapping a hand upon his friend's shoulder; "that perhaps what I hope to learn this night may not be all news to you."

"I have a faculty of picking up odds and ends of news, Bob. You see I've chummed with war correspondents in my numerous campaigns, and imbibed some of their ways. Yes, I confess I have an inkling of something in store for you, but I can't say what it is, save that Musta-el-Gaber cuts a figure there."

"Deuce take it! He's the man I was just about to tell you of;" and, rapidly, Bob sketches his little adventure in the mosque, where the great desert prince was interviewed.

Shackelford frowns and looks serious.

"It's too bad he knows about the girl; how d'ye suppose he learned?" he asks.

"That's easy," returns Bob, with a shrug; "you heard me say her maid told me, believing I was her friend. Perhaps he has the same means of gaining information."

"In a word this cunning Musta has had a spy under her roof."

"Very probable. If I can by hook or crook manage to gain her consent to fly with me on board my dandy yacht *Skip-jack*, we won't mind the spy part of the business, but leave her behind."

"Well?"

Bob continues his little story, and soon comes to the Arab merchant, Abdul Medshid. All this while the soldier listens attentively, with one eye half closed, a favorite trick of his when measuring the truth.

He makes no remark while Bob continues to speak, although moving uneasily as the latter repeats word for word the warning received from the old merchant.

"Now give us your opinion; what d'ye think of it all?" demands the younger man.

"It's about what I expected."

"Oh! indeed," with a half sneer that hardly becomes so bluff and straightforward a man.

"I did n't expect it would come so soon."

"You believe the warning is genuine?"

"In a general way, yes. I am afraid, however, that if you go to that house to-night you will fall into the very trap you seek to avoid."

"Oh! you suspect Abdul is in league with his countryman, the pirate. Perhaps this Achmed has also joined the conspiracy."

"*Quien sabe?*" with a shrug and a smile.

"And then there is the lovely Zella, most charming of Moorish maidens—she too must be in the deal if her father is."

"Time will tell," mutters the dogmatic captain, who can generally discover a mountain where other people see a mole hill.

"The truth is you don't know these people, and I do. I would risk much on the integrity of Zella and her father. Besides they are grateful."

"Eh?"

"Through kind fortune I have been enabled to do them favors in the past."

"Bob, that alters the whole question. I know this Arab and Moorish native like a book. I ought to, for I've seen lots of 'em in the past. Now, there was the time I met this Gaber, quite some years back; our camels were killed, and few of the caravan escaped. To make a long story short, I fell into his hands, was condemed to death, escaped in the night, and was pursued over the desert, suffered terribly, killed a number of Arabs who hunted me, and had a great picnic generally.

"But this isn't to the point. After I had made my escape I came upon a poor devil starving in the desert, fed him and brought him in safe to this very city. Six months afterward misfortune again overtook me, and I was captured by these same outlaws while on the way to some mines where I had an interest.

They voted that I should be put to death at sunrise. In the night a man led me forth, gave me my weapons and a desert ship,—a camel, you know,—and bade me begone. It was the chap I had saved. I escaped, and relate this little instance only to prove that these Arabs have a streak of gratitude in their composition. They never injure a man who eats salt with them.

"I remember Walter Scott's stories of the Crusades; they were the same fleet horsemen of the desert in those days that they are now.

"Just as merciless, just as daring and unscrupulous, and with the same good traits. Then you will accept the invitation of Abdul Medshid?"

"Yes, I shall go to his house."

"You will see trouble, Bob."

"That is your idea."

"It may not come to you in that house, but you have to go and come along a dangerous passage. The Rue de L'Arabe isn't the loveliest promenade in the world, even during the daytime. God help the foreigner who strays into it after sunset!"

"You forget I shall be Turk or Arab for the time being. My disguise will save me trouble."

"Perhaps; I hope so, but I have a premonition—"

"Hang your confounded premonition, Shack," says Bob, explosively.

"Just what I have said myself a dozen times," continues the other, coolly, again knocking the pearly ashes from the tip of his cigar, and replacing the weed between his strong, white teeth; "and yet, Bob, I tell you solemnly I've grown to believe in it at last. Yes, I have an idea I'm a little gifted as a prophet, besides being a soldier of fortune, war correspondent, adventurer, miner, and heaven knows what not."

"Nevertheless, I shall go to that house to-night, and would go even if I knew a dozen cut-throats were lying in wait for me. They will find out how we Yankees can use the weapons nature gave us, and, in an emergency, even come to these play toys," tapping a revolver that lies upon the table.

"I wish I was to accompany you," sighs Aleck.

"Yes, you're just dying for action, I know, old man, but I go alone; so I told Abdul."

"You can't prevent my following."

"Take care! I might imagine you were a rascal bent on mischief."

"That would be hard, but if I went I should give you some sign. Ah! Who's this?"

A knock sounds on the door.

Monsieur Bob gives him one look and places a finger on his lips, to indicate silence. Then he moves across the room and opens the door suddenly.

"Hello! You, Paxton? What brings you here?"

A man dressed in a blue suit and with a cap upon his head bearing a gold cord, enters, removing this latter as he does so. Without appearing to be too inquisitive, the soldier takes a good look at the captain of the yacht, and makes up his mind in a trice.

"Double-faced," he mutters under his breath.

Meanwhile Paxton is explaining what brings him to the hotel. Several trivial reasons are given, and it strikes Shackelford that the man simply wants to see the owner of the yacht again, and learn something of his plans.

The sailor and soldier are introduced and shake hands, but when he feels the cold fingers of the yacht captain, Shackelford has a sensation like a chill run up and down his spinal column; that hand is like ice.

He is watching Paxton's face, too, when Bob casually remarks that when they sail Aleck will accompany them. It is indeed a study, and the quick look of alarm flashing across those sallow features, followed by a gleam of rage and deep cunning, tells the story.

Paxton is not dismayed; if necessary, he will perhaps see to it that the soldier shares the fate of Monsieur Bob. He is a man who, once he has sold himself to the devil, will go the whole length of his rope.

Presently he takes his leave, and Bob turns to his friend with an inquiring look.

"You are puzzled, Aleck?" he says.

"Not I, my boy. I can read that fellow like a book. He's a miserable scoundrel, if ever I saw one unhung,—shrewd and accomplished, but utterly unscrupulous. I warrant you he has been engaged in more than one disreputable piece of business. He's the kind of a man to blackmail an English lord, if he could only find out a weak spot in his past."

At this Bob laughs heartily.

"A nice character you give my captain, old fellow; but I know you are up to snuff, and I'm ready to believe you. Truth to tell, I never much fancied the man myself. Whenever he came near me I always had a peculiar feeling. Yes, he's a rascal, no doubt of it, and I'm afraid will come to a bad end. What interests you so out there?"

"Come here," says Shackelford, who leans half out of the window, looking below.

Bob reaches his side in a jiffy.

"Look! The captain moves down the square."

"What of that?"

"The Arab stands guard in front of the bazar."

"Oh! I see—they will meet."

"Yes; and if there is truth in the wild story Campertown brought me, they will have words."

"Look! You are right. He stops suddenly and speaks to Achmed; they are conversing."

The soldier's arm draws him in.

"Just as likely as not they may cast their eyes up at this window, and if they see us, suspicions will be aroused. We can learn nothing more at any rate. The truth is, our English friend was right; a nice little nest of pirates you have on your yacht, my Bob. Pray Heaven we'll give 'em something to remember when once we get off over the blue sea."

He takes a sly peep now and then, giving Bob an idea as to how matters stand, and at last announces that the yacht captain has continued on his way toward the water.

By this time the two gentlemen have finished their cigars. It has grown almost dark in the room, so Bob proceeds to light the lamps, in order that they may prepare themselves for supper.

After that Bob has a serious piece of business on hand, since he means to dress as a Moor of high degree, and trust himself alone in the native quarter of the city.

Shackelford seems in good humor, talking as no one else can, and forever being reminded of strange past experiences. He is always good company, this man who has been all over the world and seen so much of life. It is not necessary for him to draw upon his imagination when speaking of peculiar things, since he has such a fund of genuine recollections to select from.

So he keeps Bob amused. Now and then the latter's thoughts flit away to the scenes of the day just closed, or endeavor to follow Nina, but Shackelford can see no good in his worrying over things which are beyond the power of his changing, and hence purposely exerts himself to amuse his companion.

So he cracks jokes, and tells some of his richest stories by field and flood. A keen sportsman, he has shot the world over from India and Africa to the wild West, and even the mountains of Europe, hunting bear with English noblemen, wild boar in company with Germans, and shooting wolves on the steppes of Siberia.

Bob is inclined the same way, and hence never tires of hearing the veteran tell these stories. In return he occasionally relates some peculiar incident that comes to mind, and which has occurred within his knowledge.

One yarn of Bob's interests the captain

greatly, because he chances to know the captain of the little coasting *patamar* upon which the adventure occurred, and listens with keen interest as Bob relates how, finally, the two-masted trader burned to the water's edge on the Indian ocean, and he with others fell into the hands of a gang of Malay pirates.

Thus time slips by.

When conversation runs in this style the minutes are hardly noticed, and Bob is surprised at the lateness of the hour when they finally arise to retire.

"You will go up and help me dress?" he says, in a low voice, as they leave the café of the hotel, where a number of people still dally with dinner, or eat ice cream.

"Certainly, my boy," responds the captain.

He is as good as his word, and Bob finds his help invaluable, for it is no easy thing to disguise one's self as a Moor or Arab.

Fortunately, his life in the open air and on the sunny waters of the Mediterranean has tanned his face and hands, so there is no need of using any coloring matter.

Shackelford knows the ways of the natives to a dot, and when Bob asks his advice he does not hesitate to give it. Thus, in a short time the Chicago pilgrim has changed his general appearance, and has the outward semblance of a Moorish merchant.

When all has been done, the captain looks him over critically, and nods his head in approval.

"You'll do, Bob, even in ordinary light. Let me put you up to several little tricks that stamp the Moor as I have seen him at Fez."

Thus he coaches Bob, and what the latter learns is apt to prove of considerable advantage. It is not every man who would care to pass through the narrow streets and lanes of old Algiers after darkness has set in, poorly lighted as they are, and the fact of Bob's going proves his courage to be above the standard.

All is now ready.

Together they leave the French hotel, and as it is nothing singular for a Moorish merchant to be seen there, no one pays any particular attention to the couple.

On the square there is a warm grasp of the hand, and these two friends separate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE DE L'ARABE.

When Bob parts from the captain a last word of warning sounds in his ear, and, turning, he moves along the grand square. It is still a scene of some bustle, lights dispel the darkness, and in the pleasant evening quite a crowd has collected to promenade and listen to the garrison band, which gives an open air concert, perhaps because the native fast is over.

Now begins a season of gaiety and rejoicing among the followers of Mohammed, not unlike the carnival at Venice, Rome and other places, only in their case the feasting comes before Lent, while with Turks, Arabs and Moors the fast is first in order. Gay processions will be seen on the street; bands of minstrels singing songs and demanding a penny from each passer-by, which, if refused subjects him to trouble; even women are met with on the streets during the feast of *Bairam*, though always wearing the veil, through which only a faint glimpse can be had of handsome features and flashing eyes; the homely women, it may be noticed, wear the heaviest veils.

Through this crowd Bob makes his way, heading toward the quarter where such a peculiar errand calls him on this night.

All this light and life will be left behind when he draws near the native quarter, for the narrow alleys here are hardly conducive to processions, and when the Arabs desire to do anything of this sort it is singular how they usually select the new part of Algiers. Perhaps it is because better tolls can be collected there.

Monsieur Bob knows what he has undertaken, and does not underestimate the dangers; at the same time he has a peculiar faculty for allowing events to shape themselves, and when a situation grows too uncomfortable, of seizing hold and forcing the game.

The lighted square is left behind him, and he now traverses one of the streets that lead to the native quarters.

Algiers is exceedingly lively to-night, and loud voices are heard in every quarter; the mosques are lighted within and without, and upon his stand on a minaret tower, amid a blaze of candles, the *muezzin* has appeared decked in holiday attire not to summon the faithful to prayer, but to sound the death of

Ramadan, and announce the beginning of the Mohammedan feast.

Monsieur Bob sees strange sights, some of which amuse him. Boys cast rose-water upon pedestrians, especially foreigners. Mussulmans meet, and kiss each other on the shoulder instead of shaking hands. All is joy; everywhere a blaze of light and loud voices; everywhere but in the native quarter.

Here illumination would be folly; the small apertures in the walls serving as windows, the narrow streets and passages many of which could be spanned by two men,—these things discourage any attempt, and it is to the modern quarter all turn to celebrate the feast.

Now he is about the dividing line between the old and the new. Looking back Bob sees light and festivity; beyond lies gloom and silence. It is just the difference between the present and past, between civilization and barbarism, between the feast and the tomb.

He shudders involuntarily, and stands a minute to see a band of negro minstrels swing by, heading toward the Place du Gouvernement, and filling the air with a deafening clamor which they believe to be melody. They come to him for a penny and receive a dozen, for Bob is only too glad to get rid of the racket. Away down the street they dance, and will soon be helping other bands of revellers make night hideous for the foreigners.

Somehow Bob Crane feels a singular hesitancy about entering the native town. He has never been here after nightfall, and has always believed it especially dangerous for Europeans to wander among their semi-dark lanes.

What ails him now? Has the prophecy of the old veteran made an impression on his mind? Bah! Even if Bob Crane knew a dozen men were lying in wait for victims in the Moorish quarter, yet would he not turn back. There are some natures which danger cannot daunt, and Monsieur Bob is one of them.

At the same time he confesses to a peculiar feeling such as he has never before experienced. He laughs at it, puts one foot forward, and plunges into the narrow street.

Bob keeps his senses about him; he is a Mussulman now, and must carry out the character he has assumed. When he meets others of the same order he salutes them in a natural way, only that he appears to be in somewhat of a hurry, and will not stop to converse, muttering half under his breath a phrase or two Shackelford has put in his mouth.

This serves him well, and his disguise is also a blessing. The Moorish idea of justice is a peculiar one; a follower of Mohammed may take toll from a Christian dog, and the *cadi*, or judge, will dismiss him with a reprimand if the case is tried before him. Should one of the faithful rob another, the culprit is apt to feel the *bastinado*,—a strange method of punishment which Bob has seen many an Arab suffer. It consists in the offender being tied up, and a number of lashes given upon the soles of his feet. Bob has heard a poor devil howl for mercy, and believed him dying, but the fellow's feet are hardened by going without shoes, and when released he shuffles away, having stood punishment that might have killed an European.

Being a Moor for the present, Bob is clothed in a mantle of protection; and more than once he chuckles as he sees a suspicious looking fellow scuttle by, giving him a wide berth.

He imagines there must be something about his dress to give them an idea that he is one high in authority.

Without incident of note he reaches the lane leading up the hill, and known as Rue de l'Arabe. He is now near his destination, and good luck follows him.

The third arch, his direction ran. He begins to speculate as to what sort of news Abdul Medshid may have for him, and his thoughts even go out to the lovely Zella. That one experience with Achmed and his child has made

Monsieur Bob very shy with respect to daughters of the Orient, and he determines that Zella shall not deceive herself with any foolish idea that he loves her.

Ah! here is the house—the second after the arch. Bob does not want to make any mistake in this matter. He looks up and down the exceedingly narrow thoroughfare.

A few antique looking lanterns, hung here and there, serve to partly dissolve the gloom. The rocky street is in reality a succession of wide and gentle steps; no vehicles are ever known in this section, and a donkey has such sure footing that it is easy for these animals to go up and down the hill.

On either side, not more than eight or ten feet separating them, rise the ghostly white walls with their pigeon-hole windows and arched doorways. An Arab is coming down; his bare feet make no sound on the rocky tiling. A number of boys play some national game above, but their laughter seems ghostly here. One could almost believe himself in a great tomb, and, indeed, the whited walls re mind one of a sepulcher, as does the musty atmosphere.

Monsieur Bob stands within the arch of the second door. The Arab passes by, flinging him one glance, probably of curiosity. Bob's heart beats a little faster than is its wont, for by the light that comes from the rude lamp above the entrance to Abdul's house, he has had a glimpse of the features of this man.

There can be no mistake! It is Achmed, the vengeance-seeking Arab, who has bought the captain of his yacht, and plotted to tumble him—Monsieur Bob—into the gaping jaws of old Vesuvius, where the molten lava boils and steams in a lake of fire.

Of all places in Algiers, why should this man be here at this particular moment? The warning of Shackelford comes into his mind unbidden. Can it be the truth? Is there anything in common between Achmed and Abdul? He shakes his head, for he has sublime faith in the man with whom he has broken bread. At the same time he confesses that it is odd, and yet singular coincidences occur often enough.

Peeping out from the arched entrance he looks after the man, who goes right on down the alley and vanishes in a house below, on the same side as the one he is about to enter.

Although Bob is as firmly convinced as ever that there can be no combination between these two men, he begins to feel that it is possible he may see more of this Achmed and his minions before he is through with the night's adventure. Possibly, if the man has recognized in the supposed Moor the enemy he hates so bitterly, he may not be able to restrain himself. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and there is always a chance of the other plan miscarrying; dependence on infidel dogs brings about such a result.

Although this meeting may be merely one of those unaccountable accidents, Bob feels his pulses quickened by it, and resolves to be doubly on his guard when on his return.

Facing the door, he finds, as Abdul has said, a bell instead of the usual brass knocker. This he pulls in an energetic manner.

Movements within proclaim that his summons is heard, and presently the sound of a bar being dropped tells that the door is about to open. This is done cautiously, a chain keeping it from stretching more than six inches. The voice of a negress demands his wishes, and bending forward he repeats the words put into his mouth.

"Monsieur Bob" proves an "open sesame," for the chain is dropped, and the door swings back, while the same soft voice bids him enter.

This he does, and hears the door being barred. Then a light springs up, he hardly knows whence it comes, and Bob sees the negro girl beckoning him to follow.

She leads him to the court, along a gallery, and at length parts the curtains of a room. On the threshold of this Monsieur Bob stands almost entranced at the gorgeous spectacle.

The women of oriental climes have a penchant for beautiful colors, and as their religion causes them to appear like nuns in public, they make up for this by the most gorgeous surroundings and dress at home.

Monsieur Bob is an old traveler, and has looked upon strange sights during his wanderings, but never in all his life has he beheld such a charming, radiant scene as the one that now bursts upon his startled vision.

In the first place the apartment is brilliantly lighted, and sumptuously decorated in the Eastern style of upholstering, magnificent rugs on the floor, divans ranged along the walls, and heavy tapestries covering the latter.

Then the figure of the venerable Abdul Medshid, as he moves forward to greet him, is imposing. He wears a heavy silk robe of a peculiar shade hanging about his stately person, his feet are incased in richly embroidered sandals, and upon his snowy head rests a rich, white turban that glistens with precious stones.

One glance Monsieur Bob takes at the host; then his eyes pass beyond, and drink in the most beautiful spectacle the world can present.

Those who have seen a Moorish lady represented upon the stage have a faint conception of the genuine. The spectacle Monsieur Bob gazes upon is simply gorgeous, and he would not be human could he look without feeling interest and admiration.

Zella half sits, half reclines, upon a divan, and supports her head with one hand, while the other toys with a diminutive jeweled dagger that is fastened to her waist. Words are inadequate to describe this houri as she appears to Bob; he confesses that she is the loveliest creature in the world, and yet too much of a doll to be compared with another he knows. To suit his nature give him Nina, the girl who dared the anger of Mohammed's followers in order to gratify a whim, or carry out a vow.

Still, with the eye of a connoisseur in beauty he takes in the scene as Abdul slowly advances. This is about what he sees: the form of a Hebe, garbed in the richest fabrics money can buy in the East, and from coquettish turban to gold-embroidered sandals on her tiny feet flash diamonds that sparkle with her every movement. Her neck and arms are bare, a pearl necklace being clasped about the one and diamond bracelets ornamenting arms that a sculptor would rave over. A scarlet zouave sleeveless jacket, a tunic of the richest embroidered silk, trousers of pale yellow silk, secured at the ankles with gold bands ornamented with turquoise, and around her slender waist a camel's-hair scarf that is worth at least a thousand *duros* or dollars,—this is the little princess upon whom Monsieur Bob gazes as he might at a marvelous doll in the window of a Parisian novelty store.

Abdul Medshid reaches him, crosses his hands upon his breast and bows, which ceremony the Yankee copies. Then he bluffly holds out his hand, and the other, unable to refuse, because of etiquette, gives Bob a mute appealing look that puts him on his guard, so that he only presses the old man's hand instead of crushing it.

Then he enters the room, muttering anathemas under his breath at the thought of appearing such a guy in this costume in the presence of beauty. He does not know—how can he, since Shackelford has failed to tell him, lest he make the young giant vain—how wonderfully well the Moorish costume becomes him. The sparkle in the eyes of the oriental beauty denotes admiration, not humor, as he is foolish enough to think.

Bob is, however, equal to the occasion, and makes his obeisance in a half oriental, wholly impulsive style, dropping on one knee before the young goddess and raising the small hand to his lips. Strangely enough no jewels flash upon her fingers, though she wears enough upon her turban and garments to effect a king's ransom.

Her face shows great pleasure; she speaks

French fluently, as Bob well knows, and hence he addresses her in that language.

Thus they converse for a few minutes while Abdul stands by, waiting the pleasure of his guest. They are very ceremonious, these Eastern men, and will never enter a room or be seated in advance of their company. The fashion leaders of New York could get many delicate points of true etiquette from an oriental gentleman! for their's is not studied politeness, but springs spontaneously from the heart.

Monsieur Bob has not made this strange pilgrimage by night, merely to utter commonplace remarks; something more serious and important has brought him to this house in the Rue de L'Arabe.

Does Zella know, or must he wait until the white-bearded old merchant has given his charming daughter a signal to retire, before he broaches the subject?

The words spoken in his ear by Abdul Medshid, when upon the terraces of Mustapha Superieur, have not faded from his memory, and he sees them yet, as, in letters of fire, they flash before his mental vision:

"A terrible web is being woven around you, and I fear for your life."

Already, within two hours, Monsieur Bob has heard a warning—has learned that unscrupulous and wicked men are plotting to take that which none can ever restore—his life. He has heard and treated the matter as one might a joke, relying upon himself to gain the mastery of the plotters when once at sea on his dandy yacht.

This is a beast of another color.

The conspiracy which Abdul is to warn him of concerns the present; it is at home in the old town of Algiers, and he will very likely feel the burden speedily. Not only that, but he has an idea it concerns one who has grown to be very dear to him—Nina.

Thus, Monsieur Bob shows signs of impatience, and as eyes survey him which are accustomed to reading the human countenance, old Abdul knows what is on his mind.

All have been seated some time, and served with cake and wine, for an Arab of high degree is nothing if not hospitable, and this man has lived enough among the British in Egypt and the French in Algiers and Tunis to have imbibed certain of their customs.

"My friend, the time has come to speak to you concerning the danger at which I hinted during our meeting this day. Are you prepared, Monsieur Bob, to listen?" asks the old man, who in his robes resembles some high priest.

The young giant replies quietly in the affirmative, seeking to make it appear that he is not overly anxious about the matter, but in this he deceives no one.

"When, in our previous brief conversation, my friend, I mentioned your having an enemy whose hatred for you was something beyond the feeling he bore for everyone outside the pale of Mohammedism, you immediately guessed the true name of that person—a name at which men in Algeria shudder when they hear it—a name to conjure up the devil and his legions by."

"Musta-el-Gaber," repeats Monsieur Bob. Men may tremble at that dread name all they please; he sees nothing in it to give him the shakes any more than is inspired by the presence of the dark-faced demon himself. When he faced the man in the mosque, his first impulse was to spring upon him with the fury of a tiger, and try conclusions with him then and there, for be it known these two did not meet there for the first time, but had an old score unsettled. The threat made by Musta had, however, disarmed him; he could not make a prisoner without letting the world of Islam and Mohammed know the truth, and turning the vengeance of the fanatics in the direction of the venturesome Nina, who, to do and dare, had come very near creating a riot in the Algerian mosque.

Abdul involuntarily shrugs his shoulders and glances around him at the mention of that name so boldly, while the lovely Zella gives a little feminine shriek, though she does not seem afraid.

"You must not ask me how I know this, my friend Bob. It is enough for you to learn the truth and to guard against it. This man seeks not only your life—he would thrust needles into your flesh by first securing one whom you regard with feelings of love."

Bob casts a glance toward Zella to see how she takes this; he is far from being conceited, this American traveler, but that peculiar affair with Achmed and his gipsy daughter has put him on his guard, and he sincerely hopes there will be no second occasion of a similar tenor.

To his joy he discovers a laughing beauty, not a jealous one; this suits his temper exactly; Shackelford's chances grow brighter, and at the very first opportunity he will sound the praises of the soldier with great pleasure.

"Go on, I beg," he says, simply.

The old merchant's face grows more serious and his solemn voice falls an octave lower as he continues his story of warning; this man has laid him under a heavy burden of favors in the past, and he is ready to pay the debt now in his own way.

"Ah! Monsieur Bob, you love a girl who is a mystery to you. She has cast a spell over your heart. It is needless to blush; why should not a brave man love? He, too, craves to possess her—that man whose power is so great that it reaches even her *home*."

At this Bob groans and places a hand to his head, as though he has received a blow.

"I will explain. You know her father was French, her mother a Spanish gipsy, supposed to be of Moorish stock. She is now in the charge of an uncle, her mother's brother. His name is Osman Digna. He is connected with the secret revolutionist party whose object is the throwing off of the French yoke."

"This is indeed news," murmurs Bob, helplessly wondering how Nina is concerned in it all.

The calm voice of the old merchant goes on, and Bob hears as in a dream.

"Musta-el-Gaber is at the head of this league, and it is his purpose to mix Nina's career with that of the revolution party, so that she must either wed him or perish."

CHAPTER VII.

BEWITCHED BY AN HOURI.

Monsieur Bob with an effort becomes himself again, cool and collected. Already he has heard enough to keep him awake nights, yet it is evident that the whole has not been told.

"In that case, I see but one way in which to rid Nina of his persecution," he says, quietly.

"By marrying her yourself?" Ah! but he would soon make her a widow."

"No, I meant by putting *him* out of the way. Algeria will lose no hero when el-Gaber goes under the sod."

Both of his listeners look upon him with the keenest of pleasure; he does not boast, but his quiet words mean a grim determination.

"Great is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet! But I would like to see you two meet face to face with *yataghan* or pistol. It would be a terrible engagement, but I would pin my faith on you, Monsieur Bob; I have seen that arm do valiant service ere now. But, *mon Dieu!* I am not yet done."

Bob settles back to listen, puffing occasionally at the stem of the narghile, which is the favorite method of smoking with the Arab and Moor as well as the Turk, and is offered to every visitor after refreshments have been served.

The old merchant's manner is very grave, and it is evident that he knows the danger he runs by thus paying his debt to Bob. If the Arab outlaws or any of his fanatical followers ever suspect that he has betrayed their game, trouble is sure to come for Abdul Medshid and his remarkably lovely daughter.

Monsieur Bob grasps this in a trice, and makes up his mind to include them in the sailing list of the *Skip-jack*, providing he can gain their consent to go. Of that, he thinks more anon, when he has heard all. Perhaps there is a little of the sly trickery of lovers in his actions, for Zella will be company for Nina, and if there is one female on board it may be used as an argument to defeat any remonstrance that can be raised. Trust a Yankee in love for seeing these things.

He awaits the pleasure of the merchant, who hardly seems to know where to begin, but finally makes a fresh start.

"While I am not connected with this party it has been my fortune to know some of their plans. They are weak, and even at the worst the French will puff out the insurrection with little effort. I tell you this because I have sworn never to breathe a word of it to a Frenchman. You are an American, Monsieur Bob; you will promise not to betray me?"

"Willingly, since you tell me the affair can never amount to more than a flash in the pan; but if I thought there was going to be any such terrible scenes as marked the Sepoy rebellion in India, I would warn the commandant," says the man from Chicago, firmly.

Abdul sends a ring of smoke into the air; he seems perfectly composed, while Zella, listening eagerly to all that is said, nods her pretty head in approval of Bob's words.

"There would be no need. I have positive assurance that the general is already aware of all that takes place in the Arab councils. He is not the man to sleep over a magazine."

"You mean he has spies?"

"His gold has bought more than one dog of an Algerian, and long before the hour comes for the blow to be struck, every man of prominence in the conspiracy will be in irons. Rest assured, Monsieur Bob."

"I fear not, friend, the promise is yours. Kindly continue your interesting tale."

"When I learned, indirectly, that you were concerned in this vengeance of el-Gaber, I determined to warn you. That man is a power in Algiers; his war cry, sounded in these narrow streets, would bring scores of fierce and bloody men to the spot, ready to do his bidding, regardless of consequences. He can cause you much trouble, and perhaps bring about your death unless you fly. Will you take warning and go?"

"I have a fine yacht in the harbor, my good friend, and I expect to leave Algiers on her some day, but not alone," says Bob, biting his words off sharply in a staccato manner.

"Ah!" remarks Abdul; "all the world loves a lover, Monsieur Bob."

"If I go, Ma'm'selle Nina accompanies me. I also hope to have one Abdul Medshid and his charming daughter on board."

The two exchange glances.

Perhaps the idea strikes Zella favorably, for again she nods and looks pleased, so that wise Bob, knowing how this oriental beauty really winds her severe but doting father around her fingers, considers his case won. Nevertheless it may not go amiss to thrust several pins in it or make sure of it.

He goes on to describe the alluring voyage they will have, visiting Rome, Venice and other cities he has heard both Zella and her father express a desire to see, until finally Abdul raises his head and smiles.

"Enough, Monsieur Bob. You tempt us beyond all power of resistance."

"Then you promise to go?"

"If you can give us an hour's notice we will endeavor to go with you. I desire that my child shall see something of the world, for my faith in Mohammedism has left me, and I believe in your religion, which tells us a woman has a soul, and was not made to serve as a doll in the house of her master.

Bob looks pleased.

"What you say gives me great satisfaction. I shall have a few friends on board, possibly two, besides M'a'mselle," and then, seeing the chance, he puts in a few words for Shackelford, whom Abdul has met before, thereby arousing Zella's curiosity, just as he has expected.

Still, the old merchant is not done; he has something else on his mind.

"I have learned that el-Gaber means to accomplish his purpose within the next twenty-four hours. In truth, when darkness again falls, he has arranged to carry off the girl you love."

"So soon," mutters Bob, who looks as though he could fly to the boudoir of his beloved, and carry her away by main force.

"Yes; as he has the good will of her uncle, and every inmate of the house, with perhaps one exception, in his pay, you may know what you have to strive against."

"That one person is her maid?"

"Yes, a French girl, Nanette."

"I knew it, because it was she who warned me the rash ma'm'selle had made a vow to witness the ceremony in the mosque on this last day of the fast."

"Now great is Allah, and as Mohammed is his prophet I never heard of such a thing!" exclaims Abdul, holding up his hands in amazement, and unconsciously using a phraze that has become second nature with him.

As for Zella, her eyes open wide; she begins to realize that in the great world of which she knows so little, her sex is on an equality with the sterner one, though perhaps this escapade of Miss Nina is hardly the best introduction she could have to the ways of the world.

Of course Monsieur Bob must tell the story; both of them beseech him, and he is forced to comply. The brave are ever modest, and Bob touches lightly upon his own share of the little adventure, though his hearers, knowing him of old, can imagine that he took no tame part in the rescue of the daring girl.

The threat of Musta-el-Gaber warns them that this man has a fertile brain, and will not scruple to descend to any level so long as his purpose is accomplished.

Thus the talk becomes general, and even Zella has a part in it. On all sides the situation is discussed. Abdul declares he will be ready to go on board the yacht with Zella at dusk on the following evening. Monsieur Bob is struck with dismay at the thought of the various trunks and boxes that may be needed to carry the wardrobe of this Oriental beauty. Being a blunt man he puts the question, offering as an excuse that he would like to make preparations for getting them aboard.

The merchant and his daughter laugh, as if understanding his dilemma.

"Make your mind easy, Monsieur Bob; when we start out to see the world, it shall be in the costume of the French. Zella will bid goodbye to all this Eastern finery. What would you say to one small trunk?" asks the merchant.

At this Bob is aghast.

"No, no," he cries, "make it half a dozen; leave nothing that you may wish to possess!"

"One—then call it two. That will suffice. We will send the rest by steamer to Rome."

"Good. Sometime I should like my friend, the captain, to see Zella as she is now. He has heard me speak of her, and old traveller that he is I am sure his eyes have never been gladdened by so lovely a spectacle," this with a salaam in the direction of beauty, whose blushes chase each other over face and neck, and who mentally resolves then and there that this brave friend of whom Bob is always talking shall have an opportunity to see her in the national costume, if she has to send forty trunks by steamer, for she does not think much of even the richest French dresses, though recognizing their utility in allowing her to travel without attention.

Then they once more talk of their plans, and the details are arranged, as Bob is a stickler for having things work in apple-pie order.

He asks questions and learns a number of facts which have either escaped the merchant's attention, or else were deemed of too trivial importance to be mentioned in his story.

To Bob they loom up distinctly, and he can even hang the skeleton of a plot on their hooks. It is the small factor that often proves to be the entering wedge; many a tremendous matter has originated in a trifle; the kick of a cow set Chicago in flames; the clamor of a goose saved a Roman citadel.

Bob is in his element, that is certain; action agrees with him, for his face brightens and his whole manner shows alertness.

It has always been characteristic of the man, and one would hardly recognize the listless pilgrim of yesterday in the young Colossus who to-day flings himself into the breach and grapples with appalling difficulties as though he really enjoyed it.

Some men are only at their best when pursued by troubles; editors write their most trenchant articles while the "devil" waits for more copy, and seizes each sheet before it has fallen to the floor. Monsieur Bob's abilities awaken as the necessity increases, and in a crisis he is one in a thousand,—alert, powerful, and ready to take advantage of the first break on the part of the foe.

By this time Bob's traits of character must have become familiar to the reader, so that there is no further need of words in connection with their peculiarities.

The evening is passed agreeably.

Zella plays upon a mandolin and does her part to entertain the guest. Oriental ladies are not such inane dolls as some travellers would lead us to suppose, but have their accomplishments, which, however, are reserved for the home.

Zella is far beyond the average of her class, both as regards education and observation, and yet Bob cannot compare this beauty with one he knows, not so lovely, without feeling that he has chosen wisely, since in Nina he will find a congenial companion for life, and not merely, a being to admire.

Bob knows that the customs of this country are peculiar. Girls reach maturity at about fourteen, and are married then. It is about impossible to find old maids in Algeria, since not to be married is a disgrace.

How comes it then this houri remains single? She must be at least sixteen, and a thousand men in Algiers would risk their lives to call her their own. The fact of the matter lies with Abdul's change of heart. Since he has left the tents of Islam, he realizes the absurdity of many customs prevailing there; he will not sell his child; God has made her a human being, and her father believes she is talented; so that instead of a master among his race, he would find her a husband with the foreign element; one who would love her and share his affection with no other wife.

That is where the shoe probably pinches with him; Zella might be the sultana in some great Turk or Moor's harem until her charms began to fade, when a new wife would be brought in to fill the place of honor and rule over her and the rest.

It must not be. Bob believes more than ever in his little scheme for entangling the captain. Since his last conversation with Aleck he realizes that the man's armor is not quite so impenetrable as Shackelford has boasted, and perhaps these glorious liquid orbs of the maiden may do the business, or as Bob elegantly puts it "cook his goose."

As for Zella, he does not believe there will be much trouble in that quarter. He has already aroused a keen curiosity within her heart to see the soldier.

Bob only prays she may look upon his friend when in action, feeling that then her heart must be surely won, little suspecting what intensely stirring scenes are on the *tapis* for them all in the near future—situations that will certainly keep the wolf blood in his veins from becoming stagnant.

He has spent a very pleasant evening after all, in spite of the fact that he is in a garb foreign to his habits. Indeed, he has forgotten all about that, in the midst of such oriental splendor, with the dreamy eyes of the charming Zella almost fascinating him, the sweet notes of the mandolin tingling in his ears, the incense of the tobacco burned in the narghiles used by himself and Abdul, and the measured words of that reverend person, it is not at all strange that Monsieur Bob has come to believe himself a Moor in truth, and forgets to note the lapse of time.

Perhaps, while under the spell of those wonderful orbs, Bob may have half wished he were in truth what his garb would proclaim, and that this magnificent creature belonged to him.

From force of habit his hand seeks his watch; he does not find it where he looks, simply because he wears no vest. This arouses him to seek further, and he remembers fastening the time-piece inside his rich *bournous*, where he now finds it.

Eleven o'clock!

Bob comes to with a jump.

Really he must be going. It is hard to break away from such pleasant company. He feels that he has been dreaming, just as do the lotus eaters of the East. This will never do for a man of his build; besides the situation demands prompt action. With such dangers surrounding not only himself but the being whom he loves, this idleness is folly.

Thus the little scene is broken up; Zella plays her mandolin no more, but hides it from sight with a sigh that gives poor Bob some uneasiness; you see that incident connected with Marhara is still fresh in his mind, and one frenzied Achmed seeking his life is quite enough for him.

He bids the beauty good night, and trusts that when next he sees her it will be on board his dandy yacht. Orders will be given to have a boat at a certain landing at sundown, and they can take advantage of the darkness to have their trunks conveyed thither, and with a guard proceed to the same spot themselves. It is not unusual in the old parts of Algiers on some dark night, to see an Arab magnate en-route, protected by a trusty guard and preceded by link boys as in days of old even in London, when the streets were not illuminated, and there was danger from robbers to anyone who stirred abroad after darkness fell.

Abdul accompanies him to the door, and, finding the occasion favorable, Monsieur Bob relates what connects him with Achmed, who is not unknown to the merchant.

'You say you saw him enter the house below?" asks the other with clouded brow, as though he sees something in this to cause deep thought, if not alarm.

Bob replies that it must have been, as he did not pass through the arch.

"He may have simply stepped inside the arched doorway to watch me," he adds.

"If he suspects you, perhaps it will be well for Monsieur Bob to remain."

"Here, you mean?"

"Yes. That man would stop at nothing to injure one he hates."

"Bah!" with a shrug.

"There is another plan."

"Well?"

Bob is amused, and only to humor his old friend does he listen, since his mind is already made up.

"You are an agile man, Monsieur Bob; you can use a rope to advantage?"

"I have done so."

"Then listen; beyond the court there is a room that looks into the grounds of the old mosque; Monsieur could be lowered from a small window; it is forty feet to the bottom. Then, by climbing a wall he would find himself upon another street. Do you agree?"

"A thousand thanks, my friend, but I am going as I came. If that Arab tiger gets in my way, so much the worse for him. Bob Crane does n't turn and crawl for one Arab, you can bet your shekels."

"But he may have others."

The American's hand displays a revolver. "I have six good friends here, Abdul, not one of which will fail me. Let Achmed go slow, or he will lose the number of his mess. Good night; shake hands; I promise not to be too fierce. I may need all my strength yet, who knows? Remember, the quay after sundown!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT BAY UNDER THE THIRD ARCH.

Bob hears a whispered *tob lail* (good night). The door closes gently behind him, though he can catch the clank of the chain that secures it against the entrance of a robber. Bob stands for a minute within the little arcade just in front of the house entrance.

Although he has affected to disdain the possibilities of a secret attack, and has utterly refused to avail himself of the other chances offered by Abdul for escape, it must not be supposed that Bob is a reckless fool.

He knows the dangers that beset his path as well as any one, but he has a contempt for the Arab character, at least such as is represented by the fanatic Achmed.

None but cowards lie in wait to stab a man in the back. Monsieur Bob experiences that same feeling for them that actuates the big, honest Newfoundland dog, at whose heels a pack of mangy curs snap; you have seen it illustrated, doubtless; he pays no attention to them at first until some brute, growing bolder, snaps at his legs; then Mr. Big Dog whirls around, and how the hair does fly, while the demoralized curs yelp like mad, limping away right and left, after which the honest dog resumes his career as though nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Yes, such an illustration applies happily in the case of Bob Crane, whose temperament is much like that of the good-natured Newfoundland. Take a dozen breeds of dogs and you will find their kind in the human class—the honest mastiff, the snappy terrier, the cunning greyhound, the dandy pug, the ferocious bulldog, the mongrel cur, and—the list could be extended indefinitely.

Bob waits only to make sure that he is in condition for business. Already has he glanced at his revolver. This he now holds in his left hand, hidden in the folds of his *bournous.*

He mutters something against the peculiar garments that drape his figure; if it comes to a lively encounter he hopes his movements may not be impeded, for, although the costume of a Moor may appear very free and easy to one who is to the manor born, a novice is apt to get his arms entangled in the loose flowing robe.

This is a contingency he does not wish to face, hence his delay within the arcade.

When Monsieur Bob finally glides out into the Rue de l'Arabe, and begins to descend the little terraces or modest steps of stone which mark the hillside street, he finds that a change has certainly taken place since his arrival.

True, the isolated and smoking lanterns hung at each arch and over a house door or two, in a spasmodic effort at illumination, continue to burn in their decrepit way, but it is not their fault that the narrow street is less gloomy than when Bob ascended it.

Much more than two hours have elapsed since then, and a change has occurred. The stars no longer reign supreme in the turquoise heavens above; from her watery bed in the east, just beyond the land, the fair queen of night has sailed into view. True, she shows sign of approaching decay, and has the appearance of a clipped dollar, but, for all that, shines with undiminished glory.

Although she is now more than an hour high very little of her flood of light manages to enter this cleft between the walls known as the Street of the Arabs. Probably in the whole of her nightly cruise across the heavens she will not peep into the alley more than half an hour at the most.

Still, the white walls gather her reflected light, and Bob realizes the benefit of having them this universal whiteness, instead of red or yellow or brown.

He is pleased with the prospect; hardly any one likes darkness when abroad, unless their thoughts are evil, and Bob has an idea that grows stronger with each passing second, to the effect that Shackelford's premonition of danger hanging over his head may be realized.

Under such circumstances, with half a dozen frenzied Arab foot-pads lunging at him with *yataghan* and *creese*, he will be ready to bless the good fortune that thus gives him the opportunity to see just where to plant each staggering blow, and send each leaden messenger.

Bob no longer lingers.

He hopes for the best, yet holds himself in readiness to meet the worst, which policy is general among brave men.

The glance which he has cast up and down the narrow *calle*, as he would call it in Spain, has shown him an apparently deserted thoroughfare.

Silence does not hover over Algiers; far from it. The revelry will probably last all night, but it is pretty much confined to the quarter where the streets admit of crowds, and the processions of jubilant Mohammedans can have full swing.

Not a living soul does Bob see.

This does not convince him that his movements are unwatched, for with almost every yard there is a capital hiding place along the route; dark door-ways, arches where the black shadows cluster, *niches* in the walls that look as though just made to contain the body of a lurking assassin; yes, the opportunities are as plenty as blackberries in July; all that is needed is the motive.

Bob knows that is here in himself.

He reaches the door below that of Abdul Medshid, and casts a glance over his shoulder that way. The darkness is intense just there, but Bob has keen eyes.

Is that a figure cowering within? He has half a notion to walk over and see, but on second thought believes that such a move may only bring about discovery and trouble in case the person should prove to be some ordinary Algerian standing in his doorway.

So he goes on.

Just five seconds pass by, when Bob regrets not having carried out his first idea.

From behind he hears a sudden whistle that comes directly from that doorway. There can be no mistaking the nature of it. He knows a signal when he hears it. A signal for what? Why to mark his assassination!

The place is just at the third arch in the Rue de l'Arabe, where the white stone covered with Arab characters tells of some tragedy away back in the history of Algiers that no doubt took place on this spot.

Really, a better situation for such a dastardly assault could not well be found; they can leap upon him from their hiding places like a pack of wolves upon a deer, and unless the man thus assaulted is above the ordinary traveler he must be overwhelmed almost before he has a chance to cry out.

Monsieur Bob has no need to revolve these things in his mind, for at such a time a man acts from intuition. His judgment may occasionally be wrong, but not in more cases than would happen did he ponder over the matter.

There is really but one thing for him to do. Some men might have attempted flight down the rocky stairway leading to the base of the hill, which action must have thrown them upon the very weapons of the assassins who plunge from their concealment below.

The American's ideas run in an entirely different groove. When the sharp whistle tells him that an assault is imminent he immediately throws himself into a position of defense.

This is done by placing his back against the white wall of the house near which he is standing. Thus, like a wise general in battle, he protects the rear, and can give full attention to what occurs in other quarters.

Nor is he any too soon, quick though this action has been. The apparently deserted road-way no longer deserves that name; it is very much alive now. Figures have leaped into view; they come from doorway, *niche* and arch; every shadow seems to yield up its specter, ragged rascals indeed, the scum of an Arab town, but just of a species to carry out a murderous design.

Bob is somewhat taken aback at the number that swarms into view like vermin. He has expected three or four perhaps, but a round dozen—Jove! That arch, already celebrated for some bloody scene in the past, may yet mark a modern battlefield, where one undaunted Yankee stood his ground against a rabble of dark-skinned marauders.

They give him no time for thought; a voice spurs them on, and comes from the doorway above; a voice that is shrill and penetrating with tremulous rage and anticipation, but which Bob recognizes as belonging to Achmed. In Arabic he calls aloud:

"Take him alive—double the reward if he is made a prisoner! I would burn his heart with fire; I would cut his tongue out by the roots! He must not die now. Three times the reward if he is captured alive!"

Monsieur Bob only smiles and waits, well knowing how that favors him. Were they doubly as strong in numbers yet would he defy them to make him a prisoner. What are his steel muscles for? Not to dawdle in the society of ladies, but to help him out of just such a scrape as this. He knows he can depend on them; hence his smile.

The men-wolves rush in upon him; then the wisdom of his choice of position is made apparent; for with the base of the third arch on one side, his enemies are restricted to a certain space of ground over which they can advance, and Bob has an idea he can take good care of this.

At any rate he soon has an opportunity to show what he can do in that line. The foremost Arab comes flying at him with arms extended as though it is his intention to clasp the foreign devil and hug him until his companions can lightly tap him on the head.

Monsieur Bob politely declines such affectionate regard, and sends his regrets in a truly Yankee way, printing four knuckles upon the rabid Arab's dark countenance.

It is a serious business to the wretch who receives this compliment, but Bob grins to see him go flying back into the arms of his friends; his retreat has been, if anything, just a trifle faster than his advance.

Will this check the rascals? Hardly, since they allow their reckless leader to drop to the stones, and try the effect of a combined rush.

They find Bob Crane very much at home, and he lands his blows with sledge-hammer accuracy and dispatch upon those who come within reach of those long arms.

It is not the first time in his life that Bob has had reason to congratulate himself on the boxing lessons taken from the quaint professor who for some years kept a den on West Madison street, Chicago, where boxing and fencing bouts were of nightly occurrence. In roaming around the world there can be no telling what strange situations a man may find himself in, and a thorough knowledge of the art of self-defence is apt to come in very handy at times.

The young giant's arms work like flails, and he whacks the cowardly Arabs about as though they are bundles of chaff.

They cannot break his guard; not one has succeeded in giving him a blow, until a chap from behind drops a piece of stone over the heads of his companions on top of Bob. It makes him dizzy for a second or two, when he goes at it again, hammer and tongs, with even more vim than before, because now his blood has been spilled.

A snake-like figure creeps along the rock and endeavors to grasp the valiant Yankee by the legs; but although Bob is busy with his hands he notices this scurvy trick.

One of those fancy, pointed-toed boots,

which up to now he has looked on as a delusion and a snare, suddenly shoots forward with the force of a young cyclone. Upon the night air the concussion is plainly heard; Bob grins to see the venturesome Arab mow down a whole line of his swarthy compatriots, even while at the same time the Yankee secretly groans as he thinks he has almost dislocated his toe by the violence of his exertion.

Never mind; they are fast learning something, these jackals of the desert. They have found it impossible to capture their prey; will they now seek to take his life?

When Bob sees the gleam of knives and *yataghans* and hears the Arabic maledictions, he realizes that a new phase in the midnight duel is about to be inaugurated. Now is he willing to meet them half way. He can feel the blood trickling from the cut in his head. Somehow it makes him more furious than ever.

Up to this moment he has held his own with his fists, and given his dark-skinned adversaries more than they bargained for; but since they no longer heed the order of their master to take him alive, and seem determined upon ending the matter then and there, Monsieur Bob realizes that the time has come to adopt other tactics.

When a man's life is in danger he is quite right in defending himself the best he knows how, and inflicting as much damage on his foes as his ingenuity and power can accomplish.

Bob no longer hesitates, but draws the faithful weapon, his revolver. It has doubtless been through strange scenes in its day, but none more remarkable than the one that just at present occupies attention.

There is not much choice of an object at which to exercise his aim, as the Arabs are advancing upon him *en masse*. Such is their eagerness to reach him that they even get in each other's way, and create something of a block, which may prevent them from using their weapons to advantage.

Bob opens fire.

He means to make his shots count, since there are a dozen foes and only six bullets. No man could be more collected under similar circumstances, and the hand that holds the revolver points it as steadily as a rock.

There is a report, heard above the medley of Arabic jabbering. Bob seeks to wound rather than slay, but at the same time he desires that every shot shall relieve him of an enemy. Hence he puts a bullet through the shoulder of a tall chap who, waving a cruel weapon, has been prominent in endeavoring to get at him. A change immediately comes over the spirit of his dream, and he no longer has a fervid ambition to cut down the white man. Instead, his shouts have turned to those of pain and fear. His frantic endeavors are now devoted to escaping from the scene, and he shows a laudable desire to run. This creates something of a commotion among the assailants, which feeling it is Bob's ambition to strengthen as thoroughly as possible.

He fires again.

Just at the same moment a shout is heard up the Rue de l'Arabe; a shout that warms Bob's heart and gives him encouragement, while at the same time it creates dismay among the rabble of dusky foot-pads; a shout that is American in its vigor, and rings through the narrow defile, crushing the chatter of the Arabs and even overwhelming the shrieks of the man who has Bob's bullet in his shoulder.

"Keep it up, Bob! Give it to the jackals! Don't let one of 'em get away! We're on deck here! We're coming like a two-twenty team, Camp, and yours truly! Knock the spots out of 'em, I say, Bob, old fellow! Let no guilty man escape. Here we are, right side up with care. Now for some fun!"

The Arab dogs hear and tremble; they know an avalanche of some sort is descending upon them from above. Those in the outer ranks manage to flit down the shadowy street like spectres racing back to their tombs.

Some there are who cannot do this, and upon this little squad the storm bursts. Blows sound upon the night air with startling distinctness, and are in turn succeeded by the shouts of pain and fear from the utterly demoralized pack of Arabs.

More than one hearty kick is given, and the downward flight of some terrified wretch accelerated thereby. Even Bob joins in this last rush, and the field is speedily cleared, the Arabs departing with astonishing celerity.

"Victory!" screeches a shrill voice, and a small figure in a very loud suit, with his coat sleeves actually turned up at the wrist for fear of soiling them, executes an involuntary hornpipe upon the street; then, seeing a draped figure sneaking out of an arched doorway near by and skulking up the narrow avenue, the aroused Campertown makes a break in that direction, uttering his slogan, which is nearer a shriek than a shout, and gallantly assists the demoralized Achmed to climb the heights beyond by a few well-directed applications of shoe leather, judiciously applied. Bob is reminded of the assault of a little hornet, but as this insect can generally cause the bravest to show the white feather, such is the unique terror inspired by its business qualities, so Achmed is filled with dismay by the strange object hammering away at his rear, and vanishes up the gap amid a flurry of screeches, scampering legs and fluttering *bournous.*

Captain Aleck sounds a recall; he can imitate the notes of a cavalry bugle to the life, and the signal appears doubly peculiar when heard between these high walls.

"This way, Camp, my boy—no time to be lost. We must get out of here or before we know it a nest of black hornets will be singing about our ears. This way, I say," he sends his voice roaring up the defile.

The Englishman in the check suit hears, and values the opinion of his friend too highly to hold back. He comes trotting along and shakes hands with Bob gravely; the latter is careful about his grip in this case, because he knows the fragile quality of the goods he handles, his past experience qualifying him to be a judge in this line.

Of course all this racket cannot take place in the Rue de l'Arabe without attracting attention, and Shackelford is justified in desiring to hurry away from the vicinity.

The Arabs are clannish, and will always unite against the hated foreigners; this feeling is not so bitter with regard to the English and Americans as the French, their conquerors; but at the same time they do not stop to ask the nationality when an Arab is seen to be in trouble with one not to the manor born.

So the three hasten to the foot of the hill. They meet with no opposition, which is just as well, for they are in a frame of mind to make it very unpleasant for any persons desperate or foolish enough to face them.

Looking back Bob thinks that he has made a very lucky escape. Probably he would have defeated the Arabs alone and single handed, after opening upon them with his revolver, but all the same he feels under obligations to those who have ventured into this quarter after dark, and risked much for his sake. Such friends are worth having, and Bob Crane is proud of them.

A few shadowy figures flit before them, but they do not meet a solitary soul while on the way down. The Honorable Felix keeps alongside by means of a peculiar hop, skip and jump. It is impossible for him to remain quiet; he chatters like a monkey, and while his jabber is generally of a nonsensical order, now and then the little man gets off a remark that contains the concentrated essence of wisdom.

One is tempted to laugh at him, and then again he occasionally inspires respect. Between the two his friends are kept continually guessing what break Campertown will make next.

Once at the foot of the hill they start for the Place du Gouvernement. Bob is anxious to reach the hotel; his head needs attention, for it has bled considerably, and his turban is ruined as a souvenir.

Both his friends accompany him. He has a curiosity to know how the little Englishman comes to be in the company of the soldier, and puts the question as they jog along. Shackelford takes it upon himself to answer.

"There's a story connected with it, Bob. Have patience, old fellow, you shall hear all when you 've lodged at your hotel, and have that miserable cut on your head attended to. I hope it won't injure your beauty, my lad."

"No fear of that, Aleck," laughs Bob.

"Of course if it does, you can have no chance in the game for Nina, alongside such a dashing old chap as myself," pursues the captain.

"Oh! your goose is cooked, old man. I've got Zella picked out for you."

"The deuce you have! I like that; pairing me off without my having ever seen the girl."

"Just wait; you'll have your breath taken away. And she's going on the yacht with us. We'll be a merry party, I reckon."

Shackelford puckers up his mouth as though to whistle, but his face shows nervous alarm. This old fire-eater, who can face belching cannon, trembles in the presence of a lovely woman.

Thus they arrive at the grand *plaza*, and attracting as little attention as possible among the crowds that still throng that central locality, reach Bob's hotel, where the Chicago pilgrim leads the way up to his luxurious apartments.

BOOK TWO.

Planned Under the Shadow of the Yataghan.

CHAPTER I.

THE HONORABLE FELIX CAMPERTOWN TO THE FORE.

"Ah! this is comfort," remarks Bob, when he has lighted the lamps in his apartment and dropped into a chair, for although he will not confess it, the excitement and loss of blood combined have had an effect upon his nerves.

Shackelford alone refuses to be seated, for he knows that cut needs attention. Pouring out water, with sponge and towel he comes to Bob's side and insists upon cleansing the wound. He is gentle as a woman in handling it, and finding the cut smaller than he expected, draws the edges together with little strips of plaster.

"You'll feel somewhat sore around the crown of your head for a day or two, Bob. Pardon my clipping a little of the hair off, but it won't show. It's a lucky thing that stone didn't strike a few inches forward. What's milord about?"

"Drinking in beauty; always awfully fond of moonlight; beastly shame it don't last forever," replies Campertown, deftly rolling a cigarette and applying a match.

He must consume at least fifty of these a day, which perhaps accounts for his nervous temperament. As the tobacco he uses is of a first-class quality, his friends do not object as much as they would were they ordinary cigarettes he thus consumed.

Truly the sight is a glorious one. The bay of Algiers, as the harbor is called, lies there bathed in that mysterious light; objects appear, but not with decided form; ships with white sails stand out, and they can even see a coasting felucca gliding along, heading for the open sea.

"Yonder lies the dandy little *Skip-jack*," remarks Bob, proudly. Several lights mark her position, but for which they would have hard work to believe the dark spot upon the water could be the yacht, so uncertain does the hazy moonlight make the most familiar of objects.

Although the noon of night has come they make no move toward retiring. Their thoughts are bent upon unraveling the strange mysteries that seem to be involving Bob in their folds, just as a spider fastens the venturesome fly in the delicate yet powerful tracery of his web.

Fortunate man, Monsieur Bob, to have such faithful friends as these two antipodes; the one large and with bulldog courage, the other small and snappy, yet not entirely lacking in those admirable qualities that make the man.

"How do you feel?" asks Shack at length.

"Just like having a smoke; take a cigar, Captain. No use offering you one, milord. As for Bob Crane, the taste of that villainous narghile is still in my mouth, and I shall have to burn incense in my favorite meerschaum before I feel that I am forgiven."

"A beautiful combination! See here, Camp, suppose you toss that thing out of the window and smoke like a man," remarks the soldier.

The English beast laughs good-naturedly.

"When I get a man's stature I may, Captain. As it is, these 'things,' as you call 'em, suit me. Best Turkish tobacco; a *duro* a pound, by Jove! What more would you ask? Roll you one?"

"Thanks; this weed suits me."

"Now for the story," remarks Bob, who has succeeded in starting the fire upon his altar.

"After you, my boy," says Aleck, grimly.

"What?"

"Beauty before age. Tell us what you saw, what you heard, what you did. I'm interested, you know."

"In all pertaining to Zella?" quickly.

"Well, if you must have it so, of course," replies the veteran with unblushing assurance.

"Confusion take 'em," says Bob, *sotto voce*, "here's another man gone wrong."

Shackelford gasps, and then laughs aloud.

"Bob, you rascal, I never thought you heard me say that in the garden of the mosque. Serves me right, though. Some things, like chickens, generally come home to roost. But go on. We are deeply interested in you and yours. There's Campertown, ready, like a British mastiff, to shed his last drop of blood for Bob Crane."

"Only what Bob would do for me. Count on me. Although deficient in stature I'm a tiger in action. Bet your shekels on it, messieurs," bites off the little man in his jerky way, as though afraid lest too many words escape him.

Thus adjured, Monsieur Bob cannot refuse to give his story. He has nothing to conceal from these friends. They are all in the same boat, or at least hope to be when the yacht leaves Algiers harbor and heads for Italy.

Both listen attentively.

Strange how dangers will cluster around a certain individual. An old proverb tells us that "it never rains but it pours," and as they learn what new snares are being laid for the feet of the young giant from Chicago they realize, as never before, that there is some truth in this saying.

British and American soldiers have a reputation as hard fighters, no matter what the odds, and this national trait has impressed itself upon many representatives of these countries. The more appalling the difficulties, the more determined such men become; they never give up the ship until unable to strike another blow. When Bob has finally related his recent adventures, and told all that Abdul Medshid has poured into his ears, Shackelford puffs away in silence for a short time, as though pondering over the sum and substance of what he has heard.

"I am done. Suppose you tell me how it is milord happens in your company, Captain," says Bob, who seems quite at ease in his chair, puffing away occasionally, and looking out at the moonlit waters of the lovely bay, just as if he has not recently passed through quite a serious array of adventures.

"Camp, suppose you spin the yarn," suggests the soldier, maliciously, as though it is possible for the Britisher to get through a story in his explosive way.

"After you, dear boy. I shall listen and correct if you go astray; schoolmaster abroad; see? Now, there 's a good fellow; you see, if I neglect this delightful cigarette, out it goes, and gives me a dreary world of trouble; there's a good fellow. Let's have the plain, unvarnished tale," and after delivering himself of this address, the Honorable Felix sets to work upon his miserable weed in a manner that suggests the lack of a good mustard plaster on the back of his neck, to assist him with its wonderful drawing powers. Shackelford sees no escape, and pretends to make himself out a martyr, but in truth he is always ready to do the yarn-spinning, a fact possibly known to the little Englishman.

"You remember, Bob, I half gave you to understand that I meant to keep an eye on you in this affair, and secretly I was wholly determined to be in the vicinity of the third arch when you came out of Abdul's house.

"I say 'came out,' for I had already made up my mind that harm would not come to you on your way there.

"I saw you safely through the square, and then sauntered up and down. There was plenty to see, for the madcaps are out in force tonight, and the square reminds me of Rome during the week of the carnival.

"I walked up and down, enjoying the sights and flirting with some pretty French grisettes who showered me with rice and rosewater from the windows of their flat every time I passed.

"Revenge was in my mind, and I had resolved to play a neat little trick in return when

I discovered that the hour was growing late. If I meant to be on hand for your little circus it was time I started for the Rue de l'Arabe.

"Just as I was turning my footsteps in that direction who should come up but Campertown, seizing hold of me like a London bobby fastening to a modern Jack Sheppard."

At this allusion milord grins and chuckles, and delivers himself of these words:

"Run my legs off looking for Bob, by Jove! He beats the Irishman's flea. Only one way to hold the fellah—stick a pin through him," and Campertown, having actually neglected his miserable cigarette for seven whole seconds, falls upon the expiring weed with a vigor that looks as though he had a spite against it.

Shackelford proceeds in his quiet way; he at least never spoils a story by being in a hurry.

"When milord informed me he was looking for Bob I supposed he had learned more about the beautiful plot which ends with a tableau on the top of old Vesuvius, and is called 'The Arab Sorcerer's Revenge.' It turned out, however, that his news concerned other matters, even one whose daring almost cost her her life in the mosque not ten hours ago."

At this Monsieur Bob springs up.

"Confusion! You don't mean Nina?" he cries.

The soldier nods grimly.

"That's just who it is When I heard this I resolved to take Camp in; at least into my confidence. So I told him I knew where you were, that danger menaced, and unless we made it a point to stand by and help, the chances were he would have to deliver his message to a dead Bob."

"Message?"

Shackelford goes on, unheeding the interruption.

"He heard me out and quickly decided to fly to your assistance. You have seen yourself what he was capable of. There's only one thing I regret in all this business, about Camp."

"Eh?" cries the worthy referred to. "By Jove! What can that be, my dear boy?"

"That we have no lovely inamorata picked out for the brave Briton; it is too bad," says Aleck, with a long face and a deep sigh.

But Campertown smiles sweetly.

"Ah! Beg pawdon, but just you let the Honorable Felix manage his own affairs. Take my word for it, he won't get left. Bob hasn't the only angel in Algiers. Reflected light, my boy, is often as strong as the original. Hang the luck; give me a light, my deah fellow. This beastly cigarette has become extinguished again."

The captain strikes a match and hands it to him.

"Thanks, awfully; you're very kind. I was afraid the powerful odor of your weed would injure the delicate aroma of my Turkish tobac. Again, thanks, my good Captain."

Shackelford snorts and makes no reply, but puffs away rather savagely for a minute, during which Monsieur Bob moves uneasily in his chair, and finally bursts out with:

"Come, you speak of a message; who carries it? I want to know."

"I'm the proud dispatch bearer," replies the Briton, as he arises and begins to explore the capacious pockets of his wonderful plaid suit.

They seem limitless in number, and all the while he dives into this receptacle and that, Campertown is muttering his fear that the missive might have been lost at the time he put forth such unusual exertion in assisting the revenge-seeking Achmed up the Rue de l'Arabe, all of which is, of course, torture to the anxious Bob, who is rapidly reaching the point when he feels he must seize this queerly-built chap and hold him up by the heels, so that the document may fall from his pocket.

Just as Bob deliberately lays his pipe down and shuts his teeth together, as if about to put some such desperate plan into execution, the antics of the English beast cease. He smiles in a heavenly manner, and holds aloft a *billet doux* in a tantalizing way.

Another moment and Bob has clutched it; his eyes are glued upon the writing, and they can see that he is deeply interested.

He looks up, and his eyes wander to milord, who deliberately inserts his spy-glass before his right optic and returns the quizzical gaze.

"How came this in your possession?" demands Bob.

Campertown squirms uneasily.

"Come, now, is it quite necessary for me to tell that?" he asks, disconsolately.

"Certainly," puts in the soldier, "why should you object? We want to know all about it. To the point, milord; it's your turn."

The Honorable Felix groans, and then, strange to say, grins like a monkey. He twirls his glass, plucks at the diminutive Dundreary whiskers close to his ears, and, for a wonder, forgets all about his adorable cigarette.

"You see, it's rather tough on a fellah to confess all his little amours; but by Jove, she's a daisy right from the start, and I'm bound to make her Mrs. Campertown if I have to wade through oceans of gore."

"What! My Nina!" cries Bob, distracted, as his fingers work convulsively, and he mentally figures how he shall begin to dismember the Briton.

With a superb affectation of surprise, which almost sends Shackleford into a spasm, the Englishman coolly looks at Bob through his abominable glass, and slowly ejaculates:

"Who said anything about your Nina? By Jove! I have reference to my Nanette; do you hear, gentlemen? Positively *my* Nanette!"

"Good Heavens! It's the maid he has in his mind!" gasps Bob, unwittingly, unmindful of the frightful look of freezing contempt which Campertown bestows upon him.

Shackleford rushes to the rescue; he sees that there is danger of the little man breaking off in his story then and there, to defend the whole combination of ladies' maids in general, and the one named Nanette in particular.

"Nanette; I have seen her. Charming girl, if I do say it; congratulate you, my boy. Deuced sharp thing of you. Must forgive Bob; there's no fool like a lover, you know; can see no face but that of the star he worships. Ha! rather there yourself, you know, chappie. Now suppose you give us the story, and stop trying to murder our friend Bob with daggers in your eye. Go on."

Thus he wheels the Briton into line.

The Honorable Felix is hardly the man to have any deep feelings; his nature is pretty much upon the surface, and this show of ruffled dignity is all a pretence—one of his jokes.

He removes the glass that gives him that stony stare, waves his hand good naturedly, and once more assumes an affable expression.

"The apology is accepted. No hard feelings, I assure you, Bob, but you must be careful, my dear boy. The man who trifles with the sacred name of Nanette must answer to me—*to me*, gentlemen," smiting his chest fiercely.

"Thunder! He's got it bad, Bob. Sure enough, here's still another man gone wrong. I tell you this business is dangerous; it's as catching as the measles, by my soul!" and the soldier shakes his head solemnly, as though he fears there is no use in his endeavoring to escape the contagion.

"Let me consider," muses Campertown, with a tap on his brain-box from his fore finger, as though to stir up the machine within.

"By accident I met Nanette, whom I once knew in Paris, where fate separated us; fate in the shape of a six-foot hussar, to whom she was engaged or married, I forget which, positively.

"My first question was about him. Jove! The big chap had had the good sense to kick the bucket, and Nanette, maid or widow, I don't care which, is free to accept my devotion.

"This very day I accompanied her home

It was evening, and I vowed I would spend an hour or so in her company. She tried to persuade me to retire, but I am an obstinate man when I make my mind up, and Nanette knows it. Jove! In Paris I wanted to stand a duel with that giant hussar lover of hers, but Nanette—"

"Stick to your story, man," growls the captain.

"Well, I had my way, as I generally do. We sat in the garden above the terrace, for the lovely moon had come up. You know, dear boys, love and moonlight go hand in hand.

"While we whispered sweet nothings in each others ears I heard a voice from the house.

"'Nanette! Nanette!' it called.

"'It is my dear lady,' said Nanette; 'remain here and I will return to you.'

"Well, I hated to let her go, you know, but she was off before I could think twice, the little sprite. I hugged the spot—"

"Poor fellow! But then you had to keep in practice, I suppose," mutters Shackelford, still gazing at the silvery moon.

The Honorable gives him a contemptuous look, chuckles a little, and then proceeds.

"I repeat, I remained on the spot sacredly, never moving an inch, until finally I heard my charmer coming, when I embraced the opportunity—"

"Meaning Nanette," from the captain.

"Have it your own way, dear boy, I make no exception. I proceeded to discover what had taken her charming self away from me. What do you think she said? Monsieur Bob!"

"Ah!" says that worthy, giving deep attention.

"Yes, she simply mentioned that name. I became jealous at once; told her I would plant Monsieur Bob underground; threatened all manner of dreadful things. She laughed at me, and held a letter before my eyes.

"'You have told me you knew him. My sweet mistress loves him; she would get this into his hands before two hours have gone. She wrung her hands in perplexity; how could it be done? She dared not let me go out upon the streets at such an hour. Ha! A brilliant thought comes to my mind. I, Nanette, remember that you are his friend. How charming! It is all arranged; I swear to her that note shall be in his hands before I sleep; so I have brought it to you, my own; I transfer the vow to you. See to it that you obey.'"

Campertown would make an admirable actor, for he imitates the voice and manner of a French girl to the dot. He has numerous accomplishments, this queer specimen of humanity, and they only need a fitting opportunity to show themselves.

"Which you did—after claiming toll, perhaps?" says the captain, seeing the British specimen about to roll another villainous cigarette, and fearful lest they can draw nothing further out of him when once his brain is turned upon such a subject, which generally rivets his whole attention.

"Never mind about the toll; leave a Campertown alone for collecting his due. *Mon ami*, there is the note. What more can you ask?"

Shackelford leaves him in despair to worship at his idol's altar, while he turns to Bob.

"Well, old man, suppose you let us hear what this wonderful note contains, that necessitates a delivery at the dead of night," he remarks soberly.

CHAPTER II.

BOB'S LETTER.

The face of Monsieur Bob has been a study during this period. When Felix, in relating what the girl has said, boldly states that Nina loves this man, he seems to suffer no pangs from false modesty, but smiles broadly. It is sweet to know this fact, even when the intelligence comes in such a round-robin way.

Shackelford's request is reasonable enough, and Bob sees no excuse for refusing it. He does even more than the other asks.

"Come, take it to the light, Captain. Read it aloud, so that our good friend here may also understand why Nina was anxious to get it into my hands as soon as possible. The cowardly curs! See if I don't make 'em suffer for this business, as sure as my name's Bob Crane!"

With that he falls to puffing away furiously at his pipe, and raises such a cloud of smoke as to completely envelope both the Briton and himself, from which sepulcher the Honorable Felix emerges, coughing and rubbing his eyes, while he at the same time sucks desperately at his own overwhelmed solace.

What expostulations he might make are, however, lost sight of, for Shackelford comes to time, having examined the scrap of paper on all sides, using a pair of eye-glasses in order to facilitate matters.

"Ah! Exquisite chirography," he murmurs.

Bob nods his head in the midst of the slowly retiring cloud that is being gradually sucked out by the draught at the window.

"Well turned sentences, too, by my soul!"

"Will you ever read it out?" demands Camp, standing there, all attention.

"A delicate aroma hovers about it; one can easily imagine it comes from a fairy bower," continues the irrepressible free lance.

"That is my favorite perfume," grins the Specimen.

"Yours?"

"I always scent my handkerchief with it, hence—but draw your own conclusions, gentlemen."

"Hang you, Campertown, always spoiling my best efforts. Makes me think of a fellow I had with me once when I visited the Trappist convent beyond the hills. He was something of a doctor,—a *taleb*, they call such a man here. You see we had been to the Hydra Chateau vineyards, and sampled the delicious wine in the caves dug into the rocky hill, where it is stored to give it age. To make a long story short," noticing that Campertown is slowly beginning to turn back the sleeves of his coat, as though threatening to resort to desperate means, "this doctor, being in a playful mood, endeavored to get off some practical joke on me at every turn, but overdid the matter when he tapped a bottle of native champagne I was holding, with his cane, for bless me if the cork didn't take him in the eye, and half the contents deluge him. We had to carry the wretched *taleb* outside to dry—"

"But this isn't to the point," exclaims Campertown.

"Right you are, my boy. We'll settle down. Here, then, is the note you brought our mutual friend Bob Crane. Listen, ye who have ears, to what the aforesaid note contains."

The captain has reached the point at last, and Felix assumes an attitude of expectancy, with his dapper legs, encased in the wide, loud-checked trousers, crossed and locked. It is an artistic pose, probably gleaned from some Piccadilly tailor who paid Campertown to advertise his latest fad.

The captain bends over the note and reads:

"*Monsieur Bob:*

"You will pardon me for addressing you, but in a case like this etiquette must be forgotten. I write because I have learned something that interests you deeply; because you are my friend. I have an under-maid who calls herself Debora. She is beautiful, but I fancy has the temper of a vixen, and she hates Monsieur Bob, why I know not. By a strange chance I heard, not half an hour ago, a conversation between Debora and her lover, an Italian who passes as a count, though I doubt his claim to the title. The price of her love is *your death.* I shudder to think of it, but the case is desperate, and God knows we have need of all our wits. Let me be myself, so that I may tell you all I know now. That terrible name—Musta-el-Gaber—was mentioned in the matter, and I believe this wretched girl is in league with him. Oh! Monsieur Bob, if you would only board your yacht and fly from here. Do not come to my house; I fear they mean to trap you here. Dark clouds seem to surround even my life, and I would to Heaven I were safe in Paris. Even my uncle and guardian I dare not trust. But I did not start out to tell my woes, only to warn you that you have enemies. This Count Morisini is a dark man with a black mustache, slightly curled—"

"I know the beggar; met him in Naples; he's the biggest villain unhung," interrupts Campertown.

"—and has a terrible eye. If he is among the circle of your friends, beware of him. It worries me because I cannot tell exactly what they mean to do. Perhaps I may know more to-morrow, but it will be difficult to communicate with you, as Debora has vowed to watch my every movement. I see but one chance. To-morrow, Friday, is the Mohammedan Sabbath; women then visit the graveyards, where no man is admitted. If you had a friend to enter there we could converse, for Debora will feel safe and not watch me there. We go to the old cemetery on the crown of the hill known as Bouzareah. I do not know what else to advise. Again, be watchful, my friend. It would grieve me to hear that harm had befallen the brave Monsieur Bob, who saved me this day from the result of my folly. If you have good friends in Algiers now is the time to call on them. Sail from this place as soon as you can, and when you are safe upon the blue seas, do not forget one whose unhappy fate compels her to remain here. NINA.

"P. S. I forgot to tell you that more than once I have heard Debora speak the name Marhara in her sleep, and believe it belongs to her."

That is all!

To the Briton it is not so significant as the others find it, for he has never heard of one by the name of Marhara. No wonder Monsieur Bob finds food for thought. What strange fate brings this dark-faced girl who hates him so intensely, under the same roof that shelters his beloved? Is there a dark design back of it?

As for Shackelford, he utters a low whistle that indicates the serious nature of his thoughts.

"Bob, old man, you're in a deuce of a mess, I do declare. Three distinct forces working against you. Well, we are three here; what's to hinder our grappling with one apiece and teaching 'em how the English-speaking race can win?"

This cheery voice and the words he speaks serve to buoy up Bob's spirits, which are rather inclined to droop just at present. He puts out his hand and taps the soldier's arm.

"Mark that name, Marhara, will you."

"I have done so; it is the girl who hates you because you refused to return her fierce love in Alexandria; the daughter of Achmed, whom he believes to have committed *hari-kari* in the Nile."

"Light at last!" exclaims the Specimen.

They believe he means that he understands it all now, not knowing that Camp's mind is capable of stretching even beyond such a space, and grasping a plot.

"She has drawn this Italian into the game; he is no stranger to me either. Count Morisini and I have met before."

"Indeed! Where was that, Bob?"

"Just outside of Naples. He grossly insulted a lady of my acquaintance; I knocked him down; he challenged me to a duel; we met in a retired spot with swords. He is known as a dead duelist, so I reckon it was more by good luck than anything else that I managed to puncture his shoulder, and as his sword arm was useless the seconds declared the affair closed."

"Bah! You 're too modest by half, old fellow. I've seen you handle the foils. Look at that wrist, Camp; ain't that a dandy for power? Never mind. We must put on our thinking caps, and see how best we can manage to defeat these combined forces."

"You are very kind, boys," murmurs Bob.

"Kind? Come off, old man! Why we've just been crying out for some such chance as this for a long time back. All you have to do is to put yourself in the hands of your friends."

"Don't think I'm going to lie back and let you do the brunt of the work. You'll find me in the thick of the fight every time," cries Bob.

"Hurrah! That's the snap!" says the Specimen, who acts as though he has something on his mind.

"Well, let's talk the affair over."

"What do you think of the letter?" asks Bob.

"A rather peculiar structure, but with traces of genius in its make-up, especially the suggestion by which she can communicate with us and not cause Marhara to suspect."

"That's it," says Campertown, eagerly.

"You must write to her, Bob, tell her your love, and declare that you will not leave Algiers unless she accompanies you; that if she desires to keep you here to meet your fate she can do it by refusing; you know how to put it into the right language; hang me if I do!"

"Yes, yes, go on," breathes Bob, deeply interested.

"Proceed, my dear boy," remarks Campertown, hardly able to retain his seat from excitement.

"Don't forget to tell her about Zella; you know that will do away with certain scruples she might have about fleeing with you."

"A deuced good point; anything more?

"Yes. Arrange the whole business for to-morrow night, so we can rescue her if she is kept a prisoner, and take her to the yacht. There's no telling how we can get any further communication to or from her again."

"You can safely leave all that to me, Captain. I will explain thoroughly, and keep a copy of the letter for reference. Consider that part of the business as settled."

"Good!"

"Now that's one thing. It's another to discover a method of placing this letter in her hands without the sharp eyes of hate, as embodied in the Arab girl, seeing her."

A chuckling sound is heard. It proceeds from the Honorable Felix, who is discovered with both hands clawing away at his diminutive side whiskers as though making sure of their presence, or bidding them a sad farewell.

"Ah! my dear boys, that is just where I enter into the delightful game," he drawls.

"You?" cries Bob.

"I shall enter the Arab graveyard to-morrow and deliver your note to Ma'm'selle Nina."

"But, my dear fellow, it is a strict rule that no man shall enter on that day; the women unveil themselves there. You could n't get in," says Shackelford, shaking his head.

"Ah! I shall go in disguise as a modest

young English girl. I can take it off to the life."

"I've no doubt, but you forget one thing, Camp."

"Eh? What's that?"

"Those whiskers; they'd give you away, dead sure. I don't believe they allow freaks in there."

The Specimen draws himself up to his full height and raps his chest.

"They shall be sacrificed, sir, to friendship," he says, with tremendous importance.

At this both of the others, although almost bursting with suppressed laughter, profess the most extravagant concern.

"Cut off your whiskers! That is too much, my dear Campertown. Think of your friends passing you by on the street," says Aleck.

"I know it is a great sacrifice, but it, ah, pleases me to make it. Say no more, I beg. When the time comes, count on me," replies the Honorable.

"Was ever a man blessed with such friends? Surely success is bound to come when my companions stand ready to make such sacrifices in my behalf. My dear fellow, how can I thank you?" and Bob, in the exuberance of his mingled emotions, would seize the Specimen by the hand, only that Campertown, not caring to trust his digits in that grip, turns on his heel and trots to the window to have another look at the wonderful scene spread out there.

Monsieur Bob and the soldier of fortune in the meantime have a talk, during which the whole matter is canvassed in as thorough a manner as possible.

If the young girl will only consent to go on board the yacht they think it can all be nicely arranged. Much depends upon the persuasive tone of the letter Bob is commissioned to write. It must, so Shackelford says, "be a clincher." Bob must plead his great love, and then resort to the threat that no matter what happens he will not leave Algiers unless she, too, consents to fly.

To make sure that no point will be forgotten Bob notes down the different items.

"Makes me think I'm a parson, and these are the different heads of my sermon," he remarks.

Shackelford grunts.

"We sincerely hope the affair will terminate before a parson, Bob;" he says, maliciously.

"Yes, doubly so, old fellow."

"Come, come, those jokes glance off my armor. Why, man alive, I haven't even seen this girl."

"So much the better for your peace of mind. At any rate you have thought a good deal about her."

"Oh! come off, Bob! We're discussing your affairs now. If it ever comes about that I'm in the same box, I promise to ask your advice. Meanwhile, let us get this matter settled, for, d'ye know, I'm getting sleepy," with a yawn.

"I see nothing more to be done. Why not lie down here and sleep? I have business that will probably keep me up the balance of the night."

"Just so. I suppose that letter will be the biggest job of your life, man."

"Well, you see, I'm a novice yet. When I get your age, if I've not settled down, perhaps I may have your experience."

"But we can't stay. Camp, where do you put up for the night?" he asks.

"At a little family hotel around on the other side of the square—good beds, fine service and no animated life. Come with me, dear boy; I have a suite—two beds and all," replies the Honorable Felix, in a warm manner.

"Bless you, my boy, your heart is as large as a pumpkin; I'm sure it will be the death of you yet. Yes, I'll go and welcome; beastly long walk to the private house where I have been putting up. What d'ye say, Camp; hadn't we better leave Bob to construct his *billet doux* in peace?"

"Wise thought; Shackelford; great brain, that of yours, dear boy. Look here, Bob, what the deuce is that red light burning on your yacht at this hour of the night?"

Bob Crane has always been something of a yachtsman at home in Chicago, and kept the finest little craft that ever skimmed the blue waters of Lake Michigan. He has grown to think highly of the *Skip-jack*, just as a horseman might come to idolize an animal that pleases his eye and more than fulfills his expectations.

Hence, when Campertown draws attention to the little vessel, he immediately puts his head out of the window and looks off in the quarter where he knows she swings at anchor.

A red light is burning on board; twice it vanishes and appears again, only to finally die out.

"Undoubtedly a signal, but made for whose benefit I can't say," muses Bob.

"I hope that beast of a Paxton may not take a notion to clear out," mutters the soldier.

Bob shakes his head in a negative way.

"No danger of that, I reckon," he says.

"What do you found your faith on?"

"The hatred of Achmed."

"Ah! yes; something in that."

"Besides, Paxton doesn't want to run away with the yacht; it's the money that has been promised him he's after."

"I believe you are right, Bob. Achmed wouldn't think of going without you, and the captain can't sail until he has done the first half of his ugly work. No, he'll be there on time; but that signal meant something."

"Yes, the rascal is up to all manner of tricks. Nothing would surprise me now, after what I have learned. Our enemies, so far as we know them, consist of Musta-el-Gaber, Paxton, Achmed, his daughter Marhara, and the Italian count."

"Not forgetting the men under Paxton."

"And the followers of el-Gaber," finishes the Briton, who has followed these remarks.

"Quite a galaxy of stars."

"We hope to leave a portion of them in the lurch when we set sail from Algiers harbor."

"Napoleon's tactics; always believed in 'em. Divide the foe and whip each half separately," remarks Campertown wisely.

"You are just about right, my dear boy. There's one chap we haven't included in our list who may give us trouble."

"Ah! you mean—"

"Nina's uncle—Osman Digna."

"I don't calculate he'll worry us much. But if he does, we can group him with the rest, and bundle them all in together."

"I see nothing more to consult about."

"Not at present. You get that letter done;

and see here, Bob, perhaps it would be well to appoint some method of receiving a reply. We ought to know whether she will go."

"Bless you, that's a fact!" and he makes a dive with his pencil at the paper in order to jot down another "head." It will be a wonderful letter when done, and if Nina is able to resist its sophistry she will be more than human —above the average of her sex.

The two friends now prepare to depart, and each solemnly gives Bob the tip of his fingers to shake ere leaving the room.

"The best of luck, Bob," says Shackelford, with more than his usual earnestness.

"Letters of fire; put it down solid, and the game is yours. Trust my experience, my dear boy," whispers the little Briton.

Somehow Bob hates to see them go—he has become greatly attached to them, and it is when dangers gather around that we see the true colors of those we call friends.

The door closes after them, and he can hear their footsteps dying away along the corridor of the hotel. Monsieur Bob is alone.

He looks at his robes, and with an expression of disgust, hastens to resume his own garments. When the change has been effected he feels easier, and more like himself. His head gives him no pain; indeed, he has forgotten all about his hurt in the bustle of business.

Placing paper, pen and ink on the table, with the lamp near by, he sits for a while in deep thought. Then he begins to write.

The pen scratches away until several pages have been accomplished. Then Monsieur Bob is worked up into a nervous state; he springs to his feet and strides up and down the room very much like a caged tiger.

His eyes fall upon the box of cigars on the side table; a heavenly, eager smile sweeps over his face, and instantly his hand is outstretched to grasp a weed; almost savagely he bites off the end, holds the cigar over the lamp, and when he finally draws a good whiff, the grunt of pleasure is plainly heard, for he has satisfied that gnawing anxiety within.

Bob gazes out of the window in the direction of his yacht. He can make out something of her form, while the riding lights are plainly visible in her rigging.

As he looks he ponders. Will success come to his standard? All depends on Nina. This same old moon will hover over the romantic bay of Algiers on the following night; will it look down upon his dandy little craft with sails set, speeding past *xebec* and *baggala*, outward bound, with himself and the charming Nina on deck, taking their last glimpse of Algiers, nestling along the hills. "God grant it," is the fervent prayer Bob breathes, as in his mind he sees this happy conclusion to the manifold difficulties that at present beset his path.

He heaves a heavy sigh, as lovers generally do, runs his fingers through his hair, and is reminded that he has a cut there; then once more sets to pacing the room with a knit brow.

Will that letter ever be done?

Having reached a point of desperation, Bob finally seats himself again, and plunges into the business that demands attention.

Page after page is written—Bob is like an engine that once started carries itself. He has brought all his latent powers to bear upon the matter, for everything depends upon the result of this letter.

It is done at last, just as a clock in the hotel strikes two. Bob reads it over with various chuckles, and nods as though pleased with his work, which is encouraging, at any rate.

He makes a clean copy of it to send, keeping the original for reference. Then the document is made into as small a packet as possible, so that Campertown can the more readily deliver it to Nina in the Arab graveyard.

It is three o'clock in the morning when all this has been accomplished. Bob takes a last look from the window, douses the glim, and, partly undressing, casts himself on his couch, where he tosses restlessly, as though pursued by phantoms, or engaged in desperate duels with swarthy rivals. Through all his dreams dances the alluring countenance of Ma'm'selle Nina; so Bob turns and tosses, until with a groan he awakens, to find the daylight streaming in at his window.

CHAPTER III.

LAYING THE WIRES.

The day has a cheerful opening. Can he look upon that as a harbinger of good luck? He dashes cold water into his face to chase away the lingering cohorts of the sleep king's forces, and feels ready for the campaign. It is to be a day and night fraught with great importance in the life of Monsieur Bob, and he realizes that he has much at stake. If ever his better qualities as soldier and statesman were needed, that time is right now, when Algiers seems to swarm with his foes.

He has the day before him. The women will not go to the grave-yard in numbers until between ten and eleven. Generally, the Algerian women carry dinner with them, and make what we would call a picnic of the affair.

Bob takes his breakfast alone.

Then he starts for the quay, intending to go on board the yacht, so as to make all necessary arrangements in this quarter. The knowledge of Paxton's duplicity causes him regret in one way, and then again he rejoices in it. Forewarned is forearmed. If this treachery has to come upon him, what a great thing it is that Campertown discovered the truth. His heart is very warm toward the queer little Briton; his worth could never be estimated from his appearance, for few people would want to go higher than a dollar on Camp, unless they particularly desired him for a museum freak, where he would be worth a good deal.

Thus Monsieur Bob reaches the quay, and the harbor is spread out before him. Although the hour is still somewhat early, there is much activity to be seen upon the dancing blue water.

A steamer flying the French flag is coming into port; several brigs are hoisting canvas as though this is their day of sailing—here a two-masted lugger, just beyond a *felucca*, and numerous *settees*, *xebecs* and *baggalas*, with their peculiar lateen sails, all boats only to be seen on and near the Mediterranean, are gliding to and fro.

Monsieur Bob thinks it a handsome picture as he walks out upon the quay. From a certain point he has arranged to signal those on board the yacht, and reaching this place he draws out a red silk handkerchief.

This he holds aloft so that the fresh morning breeze can catch it. Then he waits. In less than five minutes an answering signal is seen from the yacht, and presently a cedar boat puts out, manned by a couple of sturdy English tars, heading for the quay.

Bob watches the little craft dancing over the waves like a thing of life, with a silk United States flag in the stern, and somehow his bosom heaves with gratitude to think that he belongs to the land of the free, symbolized by that starry banner. The cross of St. George and the French tri-color seem to be on everything of value that floats in the harbor of Algiers, but for all that Bob feels that the day is bound to come again when the ensign of Uncle Sam will sweep the seas; this sleep can not last much longer with such restless activity within; it is like the gathering of forces inside old Vesuvius, that in their own appointed time must burst the barriers and send forth an irresistible flood to conquer all before it.

The varnished cedar boat, with its burnished brass fittings gleaming in the sun's rays, and its silken flag fluttering in the morning breeze, draws up at the landing place, and in another moment Monsieur Bob is aboard and bound toward his yacht.

Captain Paxton greets him upon arrival, and Bob's keen eyes note a gleam of apprehension in the eyes of the other, as though he fears lest something may have turned up to alter the plans of the owner, and hence interfere with his own personal arrangements.

Bob has no desire to arouse suspicions in the mind of the captain, however, and proceeds to pull the wool over the fellow's eyes in the most approved Yankee style.

He even causes Paxton's face to glow with honest pride when he praises his management of the boat. Then he speaks of other matters.

"I am concerned in a little affair here that I expect will culminate to-night. You will have a boat at the same spot alongside the quay immediately after dark. Any one who comes and gives my name is to be taken aboard. You understand, Captain?"

"Ay, ay, sir," he replies, although at the same time something of a frown can be detected upon the honest countenance of the sailor.

"Do not fail me. I shall not come aboard until these friends have arrived—perhaps some hours later. Therefore be sure to send the boat back again to the landing, to wait for me if it takes all night; you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Another thing, Captain; there is a possibility that I may be pursued, for, to tell you the truth, I am about to elope with a young lady."

At this Paxton shows new interest and concern, as he wonders what effect it may have upon the diabolical plans of Achmed, the devil to whom he has sold himself body and soul. Then he grins, as though dreadfully tickled.

"That's a sailor all over, sir. They generally run away with their sweethearts," he says.

"I tell you of this for a double reason; have my cabin cleaned up and made ready for occupancy by two ladies."

"Two, your honor! Ain't that the Turk's and Mormon's way?" gasps Paxton.

"Nonsense, man, only one of them is my sweetheart; the other a friend to keep her company. You understand; clean up the whole three of the small cabins; have things in apple-pie order."

"You can depend upon it, sir."

"I spoke of two matters. The other is this: we may possibly be pursued; hence, send two of the sturdiest British sailors on board with the boat, and let them be armed to the teeth."

Captain Paxton nods his head.

"I understand; it shall be as your honor says."

"And, Captain, as soon as darkness falls get all sail on, and be ready to trip your anchor with little warning. We shall want to leave the harbor of Algiers in a hurry."

"Good, sir. Depend upon me."

Monsieur Bob lounges about the vessel for a time, looking into this and that. Paxton shows a disposition to follow him, but Bob sends him about his business by giving him an order that will take him to the cabin and keep him there until he also comes to examine some charts.

Bob has already seen that the sailor known by the name of John Burrows is on deck, engaged in rubbing up the little brass breech-loading cannon, which every well-regulated pleasure yacht carries as a means of saluting. He saunters over that way, and, while pretending to be interested in the armament of the dandy *Skip-jack*, enters into conversation with the honest British tar.

Burrows looks into his face a little anxiously and eagerly as he draws near, and with a glance discovers that the coast is clear.

"It's all right, John—I received your message and understand the whole business," Bob says in a low but cheery voice.

"Thank God for that, sir!"

"I want to have a few words with you in private while I pretend to examine the gun. I don't mean to do anything about this business until we've cut loose from the land and are out on blue water. During the day privately acquaint your companions with the true state of affairs. Are all to be trusted?"

"There are ten men as true as gold, sir," replied Burrows, sincerely.

"Good. They will have no cause to regret standing by Bob Crane. Pledge every one to secrecy, and bid them keep their weather eye open for squalls. A few friends of mine will come on board after dark, and when we are all here our force will be increased by two fighting men. The rest leave to me."

Burrows seems delighted to find that the owner of the yacht has grasped the reins of the difficulty so completely. He feels confident that they can master the mutiny.

Bob finally saunters on, having a smile or a word for every one. Then passing into the cabin he looks over the charts with the captain and marks out the course.

Consulting his watch he believes it is now time for him to be ashore. He confesses to a curiosity to see what kind of a female the little English snob can make of himself. Bob really has a pang at the thought of those delicate side whiskers; the man who could sacrifice what he thinks so much of is a friend indeed!

So he is rowed ashore again by the same men who came for him.

Algiers by this time is full of bustle; considerable business is transacted here each day, and the bustling quarter where merchants meet looks anything but like what it did years ago, when slave marts adorned the square, and gangs of white slaves were led to and from their work.

Bob makes directly for his hotel, never fearing but what those he expects will be there or soon arrive.

On the street Monsieur Bob notices a strange figure; a dervish is not seen so often in Algiers that he does not attract attention, while in Turkey or Egypt they are so plenty that of late, Osman Pasha's army has been composed mostly of these religious fanatics, battling against the native Egyptians.

Accustomed to the sight, Bob gives the fellow only a cursory glance. He does not know that the dervish looks after him with the darkest hatred in his eyes, and even follows to the hotel.

Perhaps Monsieur Bob might have been more interested in the pilgrim could he have penetrated the other's deep disguise, for under that exterior lies the dark face of the desert terror, no other than Musta-el-Gaber himself.

This worthy perhaps fears lest the news of his presence in Algiers may have been conveyed to the French authorities, who will be on the lookout for him—hence this disguise.

Not suspecting any such surveillance, the American enters the hotel, which is kept in much the same style as most French caravansaries. At the desk he asks for his key, and before he can frame a question, the clerk informs him that a lady and gentleman desire to see him—they are in the little parlor on the left.

Bob advances and enters. He receives quite a shock, for it is difficult to believe that this modest looking little lady can be the Specimen. Campertown waltzes up to him and makes a tremendous curtsy; then strikes an attitude and gazes on him like a love-sick school girl, devouring a hero actor whom she worships.

Bob bursts out into a roar, the spectacle is so positively ridiculous, and even the captain chuckles in a strange bubbling way.

"Really, I've laughed until I'm played out, at the antics of this man. My sides ache, and I feel generally bruised up. Come, Camp, let up on that, or we'll have the people of the house rushing in to see what's the matter. Great Scott! That angelic expression! Man alive, look natural, or you'll be the death of me!" and Shackelford goes off into a fresh fit of explosive gurglings and small shrieks.

The Honorable finally sobers down, and drops a veil over his smooth face, just in time, for a knock is heard and a clerk puts his head in.

"Did you ring?" he asks in French.

Bob is equal to the occasion, and orders a couple of bottles of champagne sent to his rooms, where he will entertain his friends. So they proceed upward, and it is not long before the trio find themselves in Bob's private parlor.

A delightful breeze, coming off the sea, wafts the spicy odors of the Orient to the three friends, who seem never to tire of the beautiful view spread before them from the windows.

It is business that calls them here, however, and as soon as the waiter has left them Bob drinks to the success of their little game, after which he produces the wonderful letter.

"Gentlemen, if you see anything in here that strikes you as soft, remember the peculiar circumstances of the case," he says.

"We will," the others respond.

"I will later on stand ready to forgive you should the circumstances conspire to place either or both in the same boat."

"Heaven forbid," groans Shackelford.

The Specimen smiles and nods, placing one hand over his already lacerated heart.

"Thanks, Bob, dear boy. I assure you such kindness is appreciated, and the opportunity may arise sooner than you think."

"Come, come, gentlemen, the letter, let's have the letter. *Tempus fugit*," exclaims Shack.

Thereupon Monsieur Bob draws out the original and proceeds to read it. He walks up and down, emphasizing each sentence toward which he desires to invite especial attention.

It is a singular scene—the veteran leaning back on a divan with a cigar between his teeth, the disguised Honorable Felix offering up incense to the gods, or, in other words, finishing his last cigarette ere starting in upon the game, while the young Chicago giant walks up and down, now stopping to bend over them and slowly read a very important line that brings out nods and grunts of approval, anon wetting his throat with a dash of the sparkling grape juice.

At last he is done.

Shackelford gives a sigh; Felix, more expressive, jumps up and slaps Bob on the back, though he has to stretch a point to do so.

"Wonderfully bright, dear boy; a perfect gem. By Jove! I doubt whether I could excel it myself, and you know I'm a holy terror with a pen. When she reads that my lady is a goner. She'll consent to elope with you, dead sure."

"Do you think so?" asks Bob, eagerly.

"I'm positive, ridiculously positive, dear boy. No girl could withstand such impassioned ardor as expressed in those sentences. They breathe a language of fire. Depend on our success. By the way, Bob, you have a copy of this letter?"

"Yes—why d'ye ask?"

"Well—ah—you see—who knows but what I might at some future time be in the same fix, and, ridiculous as it may seem, perhaps my thoughts might desert me; you know at such times the brightest minds suffer the worst; and it would be deuced nice to have a copy of this letter on hand for inspiration."

"Bless me, Campertown, this is flattery indeed! Depend upon it I shall always keep a copy, and if the time ever comes when you need it, old man, all you have to do is to ask."

"Bob, you're a trump."

"Well, I hope I'll win the game then, but I tell you those fellows hold a pretty full hand."

"Nevertheless we're going to down 'em, make your mind easy on that," declares Shackelford, with a grim look that means much when seen upon the face of such an old war dog.

Then they fall to discussing the letter and the best means they can employ to carry out their design. It is agreed that Bob has done well, and Shackelford praises that part of the letter where he makes arrangement for Nina to communicate with them by tying her missive to a stone, and tossing it over a certain corner of the wall at an exact hour.

Suggestions are made, but they come back to his way, and agree that what he has written can hardly be bettered. Then Shackelford, who knows about everything that pertains to the habits and customs of the Orientals, coaches the Specimen on his approaching work, telling him how to reach the Arab grave-yard, and how to behave when once inside.

The Arabs and Moors delight to bury their dead on the side of a hill; it is a habit that has descended to them through the ages, and is almost universal among Eastern nations. These cemeteries are not very well cared for, but are always surrounded by a wall, and it is usual on the Mohammedan Sunday, our Friday, for the women to assemble here to wander about, eat lunch and have a good time generally. At such a time they go unveiled, as no man is allowed to enter the grave-yard on penalty of the *bastinado*, perhaps even worse.

Shackelford has lived among the Arabs in their tents; he has spent months in the houses of the Moors, and there is little connected with their ways of life that this man does not know.

Hence, he puts the little Briton up to many things that will undoubtedly help him carry out the plan upon which he is engaged, and Campertown promises faithfully to behave himself while at work; indeed, he has no desire to fall into the hands of an infuriated mob of Arabs, male and female.

He shows a revolver which he carries, secreted on his person, for an emergency, for he does not wish to be caught napping.

Then the copy of Bob's letter is hidden away, being pinned to his dress, so that there will be no chance of losing it. Thus prepared, the brave little Briton gravely shakes hands with each of his comrades, giving Bob the tip of his fingers only, and then leaves the hotel, bent upon carrying out his daring scheme.

CHAPTER IV.

CAMPERTOWN IN THE GRAVE-YARD ON BOUZAREAH.

The name of Sahel is applied to all the high ground surrounding Algiers, including the Arab villages of Burkadeen, Bermaudreis, and El-biar, and the country to the high hill Bouzareah, which has a small settlement and an old grave-yard on top. Here many people go for the grand view spread out all around. The Vallèe des Consuls lies below, where in the olden times, before the fierce Algerians came under the yoke of the French, the foreign consuls used to dwell, occasionally summoned into the presence of the despotic Dey, who ruled his blood-thirsty piratical people with a rod of iron.

Now all is changed; tram cars can be seen *en route* for Mustapha, while omnibuses and cabs run to the native villages.

These latter generally carry those who seek the view from the high hill. On the Mohammedan Sabbath many veiled women take the trip.

They can be seen singly or in squads passing up the road leading to the top.

This is one of the few pleasures given to the women of these countries, and accounts for the zest with which they enter into it.

It is a little before noon when a lone figure climbs the hill. Though small in stature there is something masculine or English in the way in which this single female mounts upward.

The natives she meets look at her, but venture nothing further than a grave salutation at most, which the female returns with a majestic wave of her small hand, sunburned, as is usual with nearly all travelers.

She finally reaches the gate of the cemetery, and here comes to a pause to survey the scene and recover breath. Of course this seeming female is no other than our friend, the Honorable Felix, bent upon carrying out his promise to Bob, and delivering the latter's weighty letter into the hand of the girl who has stolen his heart.

The spectacle is grand indeed, and well worth the trouble of climbing Bouzareah. Felix has enough artistic spirit to appreciate this thing, and for a few moments he even forgets his peculiar mission in admiration of the panorama spread out before his admiring eyes.

Nothing could be clearer than the atmosphere of to-day, and every object for miles around stands out boldly and distinctly, while a few white, fleecy clouds pass over the azure heavens, serving to lend new beauty to the scene by contrast.

Campertown has learned that the gate-keeper expects a tip from any foreign lady entering the graveyard on this day, and hence he places some coins in the itching palm of the old fellow, who makes an humble salaam, and proceeds to open the door in the wall.

The Honorable passes through, and finds himself in a position which probably no European has ever before experienced, and which may cause him much trouble in case his secret is discovered.

Scores of women wander about. Some are here for idle curiosity, others to decorate graves of departed relatives, while still more come and bring their lunch, just for an opportunity to be free from the grim confines of their dark homes.

All are unveiled. Like other foreigners Felix has many times wished he could see the face back of a tantalizing veil. Now he is given a chance to gaze upon scores.

He finds that the Arab and Moorish women do not differ from English girls. Some are exceedingly homely, others passingly fair, and a few gifted with ravishing Oriental beauty.

One thing is good—Felix does not forget

himself, and stare at these beauties in a way to alarm them. He takes his looks on the sly. Once in a while he can not help but wink when he catches the eye of a lovely charmer fastened upon him, the spirit of flirting has such a strong hold upon this misguided youth—so that ere long a number of the Moorish ladies come to regard him as a very peculiar foreign woman, and avoid him.

Felix wanders about the graveyard, now and then bending down to mark the quaint inscription on a crumbling stone; anon looking into the open tomb of a holy *marabout*, where some ragged but very sacred garments hang, which were worn by the saint when alive. All the while he keeps a good lookout for the ones whom he seeks in this place.

Has Nina come?

Something may have occurred to make a change in her programme. Felix fears this when he has circumnavigated the graveyard and as yet failed to discover the party into whose hands the note is to be delivered.

Just when a feeling of despair is about to seize hold upon him, he receives a shock. A laugh floats to his ears. Surely he would know that among a thousand.

Nanette!

He turns toward the quarter from whence it comes, a corner he has somehow missed. There they are, sure enough—Nina, Nanette and Marhara. Felix stands spell-bound. It is quite evident that they are making merry at his expense. He pretends to be quite wrathy, and shakes his head in a threatening way, while muttering to himself. Nina, though herself amused, succeeds in quieting her companions, and Felix, knowing his case is hopeless so long as Marhara is near, roams off.

He does not go very far, as it is his desire to watch operations and take the first chance to deliver his note. Will Nina make an opportunity for him? She knows that Monsieur Bob will in all probability communicate with her under these peculiar circumstances, and it lies pretty much with her whether anything is accomplished.

For quite a while Felix is baffled. He grows as restless as a caged bear. Seeing the three girls sit down to eat, or rather Marhara to wait upon the others, he groans in despair. Then a bright idea flashes into that wonderfully fertile brain-box. The more he reflects upon the subject the stronger it appeals to, not his reason, but his desire. Utterly routed, at length Felix retires to a part of the graveyard that seems to have no charms for the gathered females, as it is a lonely spot, where the view is cut off by thickets of cactus and aloe.

Finding himself unobserved, the Specimen kneels, produces a little pouch of tobacco, and with trembling eagerness rolls a cigarette. This he clutches between his teeth; another cautious look around and a match is applied. Oh! joy unspeakable! the Honorable Felix is once more himself.

He puffs eagerly and quickly, not knowing how soon his smoke on the sly may be interrupted. The cigarette is soon gone, and, feeling like a new man, Campertown walks away.

A minute later he discovers an old Moorish woman advancing with her nose elevated at an angle of forty-five degrees. Her whole appearance indicates suspicion. She has scented the tobacco smoke, and necessarily believes there must be fire and a man near by.

"Bless her dear heart, she is actually afraid some man will look upon her beauty, poor old thing. If they had old maids over here I'd believe she was one. Ah! she looks this way. Shall I wink my left optic? Dangerous; beware, Felix, dear boy. That old woman would suspect and—Jupiter, they'd tear my eyes out!"

He concludes to beat a retreat, which is finally effected in quite a graceful manner. By the time he gets back to the quarter where his interest lies he finds that the little lunch is over. Nina reclines in an easy position reading a novel, Marhara goes through some form of religious devotion at a neighboring saint's tomb only a few yards away, where her eyes can be upon the form of her young mistress, while the vivacious Nanette wanders here and there engaged in picking flowers.

Upon this last figure the eyes of Felix rest most devotedly. Here is his chance. Unable to hand the letter directly to Nina, he can send it to her by the faithful Nanette. Besides such an arrangement allows him an interview with the charming maid, which is certainly a desideratum with the Honorable Felix.

He stealthily follows the girl until he can fully make up his mind just where she is heading, when he goes and hides in the grass among the thickest of the flowers.

Closer she comes—in another minute her pretty hands will part the grass and she must discover him crouching there. He grins at the surprise in store for Nanette, the pretty French maid, whose presence already causes him a decided attack of heart disease.

The decisive moment arrives at last, and her black eyes look upon him in wonder. Felix blows her a kiss; she draws back in alarm.

"*Parbleau!* What an ugly creature! She must be crazy, and blowing me kisses, too. I've a great mind to scratch her for it, if it wasn't that I'd soil my lovely lavender dress.

At any rate I'll make a face at her, just to show I'm not afraid," she says aloud.

"Nanette!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Who speaks my name?" with an alarmed look on her face, as she stands there ready to fly or advance.

"It's me, darling."

"Yes, I see it's you, but I'm not your darling. I never saw you before; I believe you're—"

"It's your own Felix," he murmurs.

A little scream tells of her amazement.

"Hush! Do nothing rash; they'd kill me, my dear girl, if they found me here," he says, and this quiets her again, for the girl really thinks a good deal of the Specimen.

"Oh! Monsieur Camp, what do you here? Why have you come?" she asks, holding up her hands.

"Just sit down a minute and I'll explain the whole business, Nanette; can't do it standing, you know. Come closer, my dear. Now, what brings me here—I risk my life to see you."

"Oh! Monsieur Felix!"

"Uniting business with pleasure, I have brought a note for Ma'm'selle Nina."

"Perfidious monster—" trying to leave his side, but somehow Felix has an arm entangled about her waist, which her seemingly desperate efforts fail to remove.

"Hold on, dearest. You must hear all. This letter is from my good friend, Monsieur Bob."

"*Ciel!* Her lover?"

"Yes, which puts a different face on it, eh? It is a matter of life and death that this letter fall into Nina's hands without the knowledge of Marhara, or Debora as you know her, who is ma'm'selle's most desperate foe."

"She does not know that," quickly.

"Does she trust the girl?"

"Yes."

"Then you must warn her. That girl went crazy because Monsieur Bob could not love her. She is the missing daughter of Achmed, the sorcerer, who means to be the death of my friend."

Nanette knows something already, and is quick to guess the rest; her look tells Felix that he is already understood.

"Give me the letter; I will promise that it is in ma'm'selle's hand before half an hour. Is there anything to tell her?"

"The letter explains all. If she obeys love's call this night she leaves Algiers."

"What! So soon? How can she go?"

"Monsieur Bob has a noble yacht anchored in the harbor—once my boat; a few friends go with him. Ah, my dear Nanette, you and I may see happy moonlight evenings cruising about over this lovely sea."

"How now, foolish man, can this be if you are sailing away and I am left behind?

"By Jove! You are to go with ma'm'selle. I would hear of nothing else, you know. 'Pon honor, now, that would be a nice go! Make your mind up, and encourage the young lady to accept."

Thus they talk on, sometimes billing and cooing, anon having a little spat, for the maid is rather quick-tempered, until at length is heard:

"Nanette! Nanette!"

"I must go; it is the ma'm'selle," cries the girl.

"You have the letter secure?"

"Grasped in these flowers, which I shall give the mistress when sharp eyes are not looking."

"Good! Now, Nanette, see what I have risked for you."

"Only one, then, Monsieur. Oh! you monster, you have been sitting on my dress—it is ruined!"

"Nonsense; get you forty like it the day we are united. Bend this way, darling."

As he snatches several kisses, she bursts away and runs off in the direction where Nina and the Arab girl are to be found, while Felix chuckles over his success at bold highway robbery.

Hardly has Nanette disappeared beyond the shrubbery than Felix hears a noise behind, and turning beholds that same old crone who glared at him just after his delicious smoke.

"Too late again, old girl," he thinks, when she rushes forward and faces him, jabbering away in the strange tongue which Felix has no more knowledge of than Sanscrit.

It is plainly evident that she has from a distance witnessed the billing and cooing, and although women may sometimes do these things among themselves, there has doubtless been a distinction with a difference in the way Felix went about it, that has aroused her suspicions.

This, coupled with the cigar smoke, has made the old woman, who acts as a sort of chaperone over those assembled in the cemetery, believe there is something wrong in this quarter.

The Specimen understands that he must walk Spanish if he hopes to disarm her, so he puts on all the frills he knows how, pouts like a school-girl, and walks away with a mincing step that would have broken Bob's heart and sent Shackelford into a paroxysm could those worthies have witnessed it.

The woman glares after him, shaking her head as though mystified, while Felix raises his parasol, and continues his promenade.

Presently he passes within sight of those in whom he has such a deep interest. Marhara is engaged with some service, and Nanette flutters near her mistress, who is occupied in reading Monsieur Bob's *billet doux*.

The expressions on her face can even be seen by the disguised Briton, and he notices a light there that gives him joy.

"Make you 're mind up, dear boy, she 'll go. That letter does the business. Nanette must accompany her; well be awfully happy; unless—confound that old woman, she 's watching me again! Well, here goes," and with a sly kiss thrown in the direction of the French maid, who chances to be looking, he wanders off.

Campertown has accomplished his mission and knows he ought to be off. It would be good policy on his part to be going, since it must increase his danger, every minute he remains in the Arab cemetery.

He chances to be constructed like a good many men, however, and has not the heart to go away while Nanette is around. That same feeling has been fatal to many a brave man, just as the candle is to the poor moths that continually flutter around it, one dropping now and then.

When Nina has read her long letter through she evinces a desire to return home, for it must be answered at a certain hour, and such an effect it has had upon her that she has become very eager to make the reply.

Felix sees them depart.

After that he does not care to remain longer, and would also leave the cemetery behind, but as fortune has it there are others now determined to have a hand in the game.

He finds his progress blocked by half a dozen women; the strange fact about it is that all of them are old and ugly; the young women look on from a distance, but apparently have little interest in the matter. Felix begins to realize that it is the old crones who side with the men in eastern countries, and keep up the law that causes every woman to veil herself in public. Those who are beautiful have little sympathy for that law, though bound to observe it.

These six crones obstruct his path, so that he cannot reach the door in the wall. They have a look of business in their eyes. Felix can see this, and he feels that the critical moment has at last arrived.

Just what they say he cannot tell, but their actions demonstrate their feelings. He does not forget to play his part, but because he represents an American woman, seeing the sights of Algiers on her own hook, that is no reason he must appear a coward.

On the contrary, he strikes an attitude, with the closed parasol supporting him, and listens to the jabber of the indignant band. Then, when he gets a chance, the Honorable Felix answers back—his sharp soprano voice cuts the air like a file, and he accompanies his words with the gestures of an Anna Dickinson.

The scene is impressive; it rapidly grows serious, and would have reminded a theatre goer of the animated spectacles so often presented in the comic operas of to-day.

Each side grows more in earnest.

The women advance and elevate their bony fingers as though it is their intention to tear the disguise from his face. Felix has his blood up, and does not mean to submit. He is physically unable to contend against these crones, who will doubtless scratch his eyes out if they discover the truth.

Campertown knows full well the danger to which he is exposed, and does not lose his presence of mind. He has a faculty for preserving that even in most trying circumstances.

The women still advance, but not a foot does the little hero yield; his stout parasol is now held in front of him as a weapon of defence, for he notices that his assailants have picked up cudgels in the shape of sticks. The clatter of tongues increases until it is perfectly terrible; he can look into the angry eyes of the six crones, and the supreme moment has come.

Suddenly there is a succession of shrieks; a panic has broken out among the native women, and with a great fluttering of skirts they rush pell mell in all directions; some fall and scramble over old grave stones, while in about one moment the disguised Felix has the field to himself.

He smiles and chuckles as he replaces in his bosom the little revolver that has been the cause of all this consternation, and then makes a bee-line for the door in the wall, which he soon reaches, passes through, and descends the hill of Bouzareah, to meet some vehicle below that will carry him, triumphant, back into Algiers.

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE GARDEN WALL.

At two o'clock on the afternoon of this same day Monsieur Bob walks up and down the Place du Gouvernement with a quick, nervous stride.

Standing in the door of the hotel can be seen the tall figure of Captain Shackelford, smoking as usual, watching the passers-by, and enjoying the strange scene as only an old traveler may. This is *life* to him; he could never exist shut up in some back English or American town, where the event of the day would be the arrival of the one train.

Plainly Bob is growing nervous because the man he looks for fails to turn up. He imagines all manner of evils as having overtaken Felix, and blames himself for not having gone to the graveyard with the little man. He could have remained outside, and if trouble came, have rushed to Campertown's assistance.

This anxiety prevents Bob from keeping cool, as his friend Shackelford has done. When he passes the other for the tenth time he hears him say:

"Look toward the Kasbah; lo, the conquering hero comes!"

Bob's eyes flash in that direction, and what he sees causes him to utter an ejaculation of intense delight. Sauntering along as big as life comes the great Campertown, loud plaid suit, tourist hat of the same material, huge cane, patent leathers, and spy-glass cocked in his right optic. Ridiculous as this figure appears, there is one man on the plaza just ready to take Camp in his arms and squeeze him, such is his delight at setting eyes on the Briton.

Needless to remark, this infatuated individual is Monsieur Bob. He can be excused on the plea that he is in love, not with Campertown it is true, but in his eyes the Specimen is an angelic messenger—a heavenly go-between.

Felix has lost a portion of his glory—there is a something changed about him, his friends notice, but it probably only dawns on them after hours have passed that he has gathered in his diminutive crop of side whiskers.

Bob hastens toward his victim, but Felix bluntly refuses to shake hands. There is a look of reproach in his eyes as he holds back.

"By Jove! you squeezed me last time, dear boy. I have foresworn shaking with every one. Always prided myself on my neat hand;

deuced shame to have a bone broken. Practice on the end of my cane if you must, Bob, my dear fellow," and he thrusts out the cane, which has actually something like a human hand carved at the end of it; but the man from Chicago waves it aside.

"Never mind, Felix; it's all right; no harm done. Tell me, did you see Nina?" he asks.

"To tell the truth I did.

"And handed her the letter?"

"No."

"Confusion! What does this mean?" demands Bob, aghast at the reply.

"Well, you see, that Marhara hung to her; never took her eyes off the ma'm'selle. I saw it was no go trying to hand the letter to her; had what I thought was a bright idea; waylaid Nanette, gave her the letter; she hid it among the flowers she was picking for her charming lady."

"All very fine, milord, but how in the deuce do you know whether Nina received it?"

Felix chuckles.

"Ridiculously clever in me, you see, but my eyes told me so. To be brief, I watched the lovely ma'm'selle read the letter."

"Come, old fellow, you'd better confine those adjectives to Nanette. She might not like to hear you use them in connection with another. Women are queerly constructed, Felix."

"A thousand thanks, dear boy. Shall remember. Nanette is the one bright particular star in my eyes, you know—" babbles the other, when Bob, who thinks of but one thing, interrupts him.

"Tell me the whole story, there's a good man."

Nothing pleases Felix better, and as they join the soldier, the three sit down upon the piazza of the hotel, where they can talk comfortably, and at the same time observe the people passing.

Campertown does nobly, and with sundry jerks and starts spins the whole yarn, much to the edification of his hearers. At its conclusion, before he will answer any questions, he must needs roll a cigarette and indulge.

Then they talk the matter over, and endeavor to see where it can be helped, coming to the conclusion ere long that nothing can really be done until they hear from Nina.

This makes Shackelford ask:

"When did you appoint a time for being on hand to receive an answer over the garden wall?"

Bob draws out the original draft of his letter, and places a finger on a certain spot. "You see, these words—'at the southwest corner of the garden, between three and four o'clock. Tie the letter to a piece of stone and cast it over the wall.'"

Shackelford nods his head.

"Plain English, eh, Felix?"

"Ridiculously so, dear boy."

"And, Bob, seeing that it now lacks only half an hour of three P. M., if I were you I'd be trotting in the direction of that same garden wall. To be late might ruin everything."

"What you say indicates a clear head, my dear Captain. I'm off. Where will I find you when I return?"

"Somewhere around here. Camp and I may indulge in some flirtation on the sly while you're gone."

"Hush! says the little man, nervously looking around as though he expects to see the black-eyed Nanette close by; "I'm out of that business now, dear boy; *engaged*, you know," with a ghastly grin, and a roll of his eyes, which expression brings out a chuckle from the captain, to whom life would indeed be a dreary waste unless he could find something to laugh at, and the dapper little Briton seems to rather enjoy creating merriment.

So Monsieur Bob hurries away, bent upon love's errand. Fatigue is ever ignored when such a mission calls, and every pulse quickens at the thought of his fate being held in the balance. Will Nina consent? What if she refuse? The world will seem dark indeed, then. No wonder Bob is excited, for what lover would not be who has put his all to the test and awaits the answer in trepidation and doubt.

Mustapha Superieur lies before him, with its Moorish and modern houses, its terraces and walls, its clambering vines and profusion of flowers.

He mounts the hill.

Bob is no stranger here, and knows where the home of Ma'm'selle Nina is located. What lover does not hover around the dwelling place of his adored one, for where the treasure is there must the heart be also.

Before him rises the grim wall that encloses the garden, where beautiful flowers bloom, and beauty herself walks in snowy attire.

Years ago this same home, occupied by Osman Digna and his niece, was owned by one of the most desperate as well as richest pirates of all Algiers; from these same walls many a time keen eyes swept the blue sea for signs of unhappy vessels, which, when sighted, would be chased by Algerian craft, captured, and the crews reduced to abject slavery.

Bob refers to his watch and finds it just lacking a few minutes of three. At any rate he is on time, and that pleases him.

Close by is a ruined tower, which in the times gone by has served for signaling the pirate vessels in the harbor; perhaps at night served as a beacon to guide *felucca* and *baggala* into the haven, as they returned laden with spoils.

Bob cares not a rap what its original use may have been; he is only interested in what it can do for him just now.

He climbs the remnant of the old tower, more than once loosening a stone that clatters down among the debris at the foot. When he reaches a small opening about the top, he stops. The situation pleases him; on one side the panorama of harbor and sea is spread out, while, by turning his head, he can look through the little fissure into the garden, being elevated above the wall.

Thus Bob waits.

Keenly he surveys the quaint old Moorish house beyond, with its small windows. It has a court in the center, no doubt, with fountain playing, though that same thing seems almost useless when such a rose garden belongs to the place. No doubt this court had its uses under the old regime.

Not a soul can he see at first; the garden is apparently deserted. Bob, with his heart acting in the queerest way imaginable, proceeds to spend the next hour, if need be, in feasting his eyes upon that pile which hides the lovely form of his adored one; there is nothing strange about his actions, since lovers the wide world over have always made themselves ridiculous by such mute adoration.

Thus time passes.

Once or twice Bob imagines he sees a white robed figure flit by some casement, but, although each time it gives him a start, he is not able to satisfy himself that it is Nina.

So he bides his time as patiently as any philosopher in love could expect to.

At last his reward comes.

Bob's heart gives a sudden bound as he discovers a trim figure, clad in fleecy white, moving about among the beds, where roses bloom in riotous profusion.

He cannot see her face, for a sun shade hides it—a delicate affair of silk and lace, that seems just in harmony with Nina; but Bob never once doubts the identity of the one who strolls hither and thither.

He notes one fact with keen pleasure; she continues to draw nearer to the marked corner, as though there is an object in her stroll.

Now she has reached the place; not more than thirty feet separate him from the object of his devotion. Thirty feet! What matters such a distance when love can annihilate miles of space! She bends down; ah! those dainty hands have picked up a rather large pebble, and around this they fasten the threads that already clasp a missive she discloses.

All her movements indicate a desire to hide what she is doing from the eyes of any one who may be looking from the house.

Imagine Bob's sensations as he crouches there, up in the old tower, and watches the casting of the missive that carries his fate. He trembles as though with the ague, but not once does he remove his eyes from the figure in white.

Now the stone has apparently been adjusted, for she bends forward. The hand that holds the missive is held out over the wall; the fingers relax, and a fluttering white object goes down.

Monsieur Bob coughs; he cannot resist the inclination, to save his neck, and as the parasol is moved aside, while a fair face looks directly up at him, he throws a kiss. She gives a faint scream, while he on his part groans.

"Confusion! It's Nanette!" he mutters, for the pert French maid has given him one bright smile, and then walked away.

"Never mind," thinks Bob, "it's all in the family, and there is little danger of a discreet girl like Nanette repeating tales; besides, was n't it all a mistake anyhow?"

Ah! The letter—the precious letter; he is forgetting it all this while. So he begins to descend from his elevated position.

It is sometimes one thing to ascend a ruin, and quite another to get down. Bob finds this to be a fact when he attempts the job, but, being a natural gymnast, he succeeds in accomplishing the feat, with one or two close shaves in the way of a slip, where only his quickness and muscular arms save him.

At length he reaches the bottom. Stepping out of the ruined tower he looks about for the precious letter that holds his fate.

To his amazement, what does he behold but a ragged dervish, bending over and picking up the missive! He holds it aloft, and seems to be surveying it with interest, as who would not to discover a letter and a stone tied together?

Monsieur Bob takes five immense strides and his hand clutches the shoulder of the dervish, whom he whirls around.

"The letter—it is mine," he manages to say in Arabic, depending more upon his gestures in pointing than on his correct language.

It seems that the pilgrim is not so anxious to deliver up the goods, but holds the letter away from Bob's outstretched hand.

"Not so fast," he says in plain English, which, however, does not appear so singular to Bob, his whole mind being wrapped up in the idea of gaining possession of the missive.

"It is mine," he repeats, in English.

"Finders, keepers—possession is nine points of the law," returns this remarkable dervish.

"My name is Monsieur Bob; you will find that written upon it," declares the other, wondering what keeps him from falling upon this tantalizing old rascal and wiping the earth with him.

"That is true; I have already seen that. I will return it on one condition."

"Well, I am restraining my natural inclination to jump in and thrash a man of your size, you see; what is that condition?"

"That you allow me to read it first," is the astounding reply he receives.

This arouses Bob's suspicions, as it also gives him cause for anger.

"I begin to think you are more than the poor dervish you seem." With a quick movement he snatches away the covering that partially hides the face of the other, and immediately exclaims: "Just as I thought! Mr. Musta-el-Gaber is on deck once more!"

Monsieur Bob is right at home here. Thank Heaven, this meeting does not occur inside of a mosque, as did their last one, where fear for the safety of the girl he loved tied his tongue and kept him from making a move.

He knows the desperate nature of the man with whom he stands face to face; that man holds the note that carries his fate, the answer to the letter he sent Nina asking her to be his wife, and fly with him from Algiers on this very coming night. Were he ten times Musta-el-Gaber, Bob Crane would force him to hand over that precious document.

The man from Chicago seems to visibly swell before the eyes of the other; his whole aspect becomes terrible, and he actually towers above his adversary, while his hands are outstretched, and the powerful fingers work as if eager to clutch their prey.

"Hand me that note, or by the prophet I'll pulverize you! Hand it to me *now!*" he grits between his white teeth.

"Bah! What if I should destroy it?" taunts the other, only half-subdued.

"You couldn't do it, man! I defy you. At the first tear I'd be upon you like a sirocco of the desert, and for that I'd murder you here and now; d'ye hear, Musta-el-Gaber? You would never leave this place alive! Oh! scowl, if you please, and put your hand to your girdle; I know you are armed, but see here, this is what I call my gentle persuader; if you draw a single weapon you're a dead man."

The Algerian outlaw shrugs his shoulders when he finds himself covered with a Remington six-shooter; he has looked into such tools before, and knows what terrible weapons they may be in the hands of determined men.

Philosophy enters into even such a life as his; at least he does not fail to see how much more advantageous it is for Musta-el-Gaber to live without this disputed letter, than for him to die while endeavoring to retain it.

With a frown and a deep Arab curse he throws the weighted letter down.

Perhaps he expects Monsieur Bob in his eagerness to bend over and grasp for the missive, when he can easily jump upon him. This the American is too shrewd to do. He can see through a mill stone that has a hole in it. Instead of bending down, he simply places a foot upon the letter which he has wrested from the other. The trusty six shooter still covers the Algerian land pirate, whose scowl becomes blacker than midnight, as he realizes that his last card is a total failure.

"Your road is down yonder; see that you do not stop until you are beyond the turn. Go!"

Monsieur Bob speaks like a master, and this man, who is accustomed to having others tremble at the sound of his voice, finds himself forced to obey as though he were a slave. If looks could kill, the scowl he gives Bob Crane as he turns and moves off must annihilate the

Yankee, who, keeping an eye on the retreating Algerian, now stoops to secure the letter.

He breaks the thread that secures the stone, and carefully places the, as yet, unread missive that carries his hopes and fears in the most secure pocket of his coat. Then he strides after the man whose presence in Algiers is a constant menace to him and the one he loves.

Musta-el-Gaber soon turns into a side street that, if followed, will take him to the old part of the city, while Monsieur Bob, looking around, discovers a snug spot where he can peruse the missive which he is dying to read.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LION IN LOVE.

Again Monsieur Bob arrives upon the public square. The sun is nearly ready to sink behind the hills in the west. It has really been quite an eventful day with his fortunes, and the night so near at hand promises to prove even more so. So long as everything works well Monsieur Bob is utterly indifferent with regard to any adventure that may befall him, since he has long lived in an atmosphere of excitement.

He looks for his friends, and at first sees nothing of them, but after a little hears his name called as he walks down the square, and turning his head beholds a huge cane waving in the window of a café near by.

That is enough, since only one man in all Algiers carries such a staff. The Honorable Felix must be there, and Bob enters. He finds Campertown alone, at which he marvels a little, and at once asks after the soldier, but the Briton shakes his head.

"Don't know; excused himself a short time after you left us; ridiculous notion, of course, but, d'ye know, I've an idea there was a female in the case; yes, our woman-hater bids fair to be a masher, and you must look to your laurels."

"Me? I'm out of the race, man! It lies between you two, I reckon," says Bob.

"Count me out, too; that little Nanette has cured me of wanting to flirt," declares Felix.

"Ah! Well, Shack must go it alone, then; but how came you in this place?"

"Beastly warm out there; looked cool in here, so I changed. I've been putting away ice-cream—ah! here we have it," and bending out of the café window he punches his cane into the ribs of a passing gentleman, gives a gasp and bobs in again, turtle fashion, exclaiming:

"Ridiculous, you know, but I've punched the wrong chap, and I suppose I'm in for it! You'll find my will and other papers, dear boy, in my pocket; carry out my last wishes, will you? And tell Nanette I died game. Here he comes."

A deep bass voice is heard in the café; it is like the roar of a bull.

"Where's that monkey-faced man who insulted me? Who tried to break my ribs with his club? I'm here to murder him; to break every bone in his body. Get out of the way, you frog-eating *garcon!*" A tumbling sound ensues, as of a waiter waltzing over the tables.

"I know where he holds forth—watch me shake him."

As the last word is bellowed forth the curtain that separates the niche at the window from the main café is brushed furiously aside, and a big man strides into view; a man who is boiling over with fierceness, and a desire to annihilate the party who has assaulted him.

He sees a rather peculiar scene; the little bantam rooster does not cower in a corner, but rolls back the sleeves of his coat as though preparing for an unavoidable scrap, while Monsieur Bob stands there hardly knowing whether to laugh or not.

"Keep your distance, sir;" cries the little man, as he raises his cane threateningly.

The huge American traveler stares at him as though hardly able to believe his senses. This *thing* defying him? It seems absurd! Why, he can crush him with one hand, or, trying another dodge, rattle him to pieces by shaking.

He finds his voice again; he roars invectives against the disturber of his peace; he declares it his intention to wipe the floor with the Briton, as his forefathers did with the redcoats in '76, and is proceeding to put his threat into execution, when he runs against something that hurls him back half a dozen feet. That something is the arm of Monsieur Bob.

For the first time the big man notices that the Specimen is not alone.

"What! You here, Monsieur Bob Crane?" he exclaims, in wonder.

The other coolly divests himself of his coat, and takes a step forward.

"Senator, this is a friend of mine. He made a mistake, and is ready to apologize if you go about it the right way. When it comes to a fight, however, you understand he's not in your class. I am his friend; I will give you all the satisfaction you want in three minutes."

At this the big stranger laughs hoarsely.

"And a deuced sight more than I want. Oh! yes, I know you, Monsieur Bob. So it was a mistake, was it? I accept your apology, sir, only don't ever try it again. I'm all ginger, you see—I fly off the handle like wild-fire. Now, who in thunder did you take me for?"

The bulky senator from across the big pond does not want to fight as much as he thought he did; circumstances alter cases, you know. He is a loud-voiced, good-natured millionaire, seeing the world with the "gals," meaning his wife and two daughters. Standing there with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, and a prize grin decorating his face—who could cherish animosity against such a man?

Upon being told that Felix mistook him for

Captain Shackelford, he shakes all over with laughter, as some recollection presents itself.

"Tit for tat! Pays me back for the joke I had on Shack, but I did n't dream the beggar was in town;" and then he goes on to relate some incident of the past where the captain got into trouble, which possesses enough comic qualities to make the others smile and the senator roar.

Then he suddenly remembers that the "gals" have been left in some place or other which may not be very pleasant once darkness falls, insists on shaking hands all around, invites the gentlemen to dine with himself and family, as a sight of familiar faces will be a boon to the "gals" after seeing so many strangers, and then betakes himself off, much to the delight of Monsieur Bob, who fears lest they may be burdened with this loud-voiced monster. In his present condition he cannot take any stock in the shady stories of the bluff senator, and desires quiet. So they fall to watching the promenade again, hoping that the missing Shackelford will soon put in an appearance.

Bob even grows nervous about the matter, but just when this feeling is approaching the desperate stage the object of their solicitude shows up, walking with a quick stride along the square.

This time it is Bob who calls to him, since

Campertown declares his eyesight is growing ridiculously defective without the use of his glass. At the sound of Bob's voice Shackelford starts and shows much satisfaction. He speedily joins them in their snug retreat.

Bob breathes easy again, for this looks as though fortune meant to be kind. His heart is full toward these friends who stand by him so nobly in his endeavor to win the girl he loves. Never, while he lives, will he forget such unselfish devotion.

Shackelford says nothing regarding the cause of his detention, but buckles to the task of learning how Bob succeeded. The story is soon told. Then comes the letter. Of course Bob does not hand this around—that would be profaning something that is very sacred to him.

"Gentlemen, you will excuse me for not reading a portion of this letter; it is a personal matter; I know you will rejoice with me; success has attended my efforts; Nina will accompany us."

"I knew that letter would fetch her; I've been thinking about it ever since. Why, dear boy, you put it to her in an unanswerable light; you showed her how treachery surrounded her; that to stay meant the sacrifice of her life to that friend of her uncle—that monster Musta-el-Gaber," says Felix, with animation.

"Nevertheless," smiles Bob, "those were not the arguments that did the business. It was really my threat to remain and meet my fate unless she consented to go that brought Nina to terms."

"I will remember that," mutters the Specimen. "In dealing with fickle woman a man cannot be too well armed with such notions. Ridiculous notion of mine, but quite true. By the way, Bob."

"Yes," answers the other.

"You still have a copy of that letter?

"Safe and sound, old fellow," touching the breast of his coat to indicate that it reposes there.

"Keep it, dear boy; no telling what uses it may yet come to. A human destiny may hang upon it."

"Now let's return to our mutton," interrupts the soldier, out of patience with this side play; "what part of the letter do you intend to read, Bob?" for the other has the missive in his hands, and is evidently about to give them the benefit of a portion.

"Acting under my directions, Nina has written out a very plain and substantial description of the course she means to pursue."

"We have already had a specimen of her

work," says Shackelford, referring to the other letter.

Bob begins to read:

"'I will endeavor to follow out this plan as closely as circumstances will allow. Our house is closed and locked like a castle at about nine o'clock at night. No one can leave it except from some upper window by means of a rope ladder. Marhara, as I know her now, is very suspicious, and will not leave me, but I shall find an opportunity to make use of a drug that has long been in my possession. She must sleep. What you have told me has caused me to make up my mind. I am determined to leave the shelter of my treacherous uncle's house before the rising of another sun. You see, Monsieur Bob, how much I trust to your honor as a gentleman. Everything is in your hands. Mark, now, what I write, and let nothing change the arrangements:

"'At eleven o'clock exactly, I shall come to my window. It is the third from the corner, and faces the harbor—on the third floor in the rear. Just below are the rose bushes. Among these Monsieur Bob hides. When he hears several pebbles drop, feel for the cord which I shall have lowered. To this attach the rope ladder, which must be provided; there will be something to which it may be fastened above; after that all will be easy sailing.'"

The Honorable Felix groans dismally.

"What's the matter?" exclaims Shackelford.

"My goose is cooked!"

"The deuce! What ails the man?"

"I'm a gone case; knocked out in the first round; done brown, dear boys," he says faintly.

"Good Heavens! Has the man been poisoned, or secretly wounded?" cries Bob, but the captain shakes his head.

"I'm more of the opinion that it's something in yonder letter has disagreed with him."

"That's it," says Felix, opening his eyes and showing some signs of animation," you see she's decided to leave Nanette behind; perhaps that el-Gaber will take a notion to carry her off; I shall have to remain and murder him!"

"Nonsense, man! Further on she speaks of her dear Nanette accompanying her. You jump at conclusions too readily," says Bob.

"Ridiculous fool! Pardon me, dear boys. I am dumb from henceforth."

"Proceed, Bob."

"'Remember the time and place. We will be in dispair if you do not come. Beware of the dog! Uncle keeps a huge hound in the yard, and he is very fierce. We will pray for your success, Monsieur Bob.'"

He stops here.

"That is about all that will interest you, my friends. What do you think of it?"

"Plain enough for a blind man to follow. We must make or secure that rope ladder one of the first things of all. How long would it have to be, d'ye think, Bob," asks the captain.

Bob hazards a guess at twenty-five feet.

"That is good. We'll secure it somehow.

See here, Camp, what's engaging your serious thoughts?"

For answer the Specimen gives a sudden snarl, and clutches Shackelford's leg below the knee in a fierce clasp. It is an eloquent illustration, and impresses the others profoundly.

"Ah! I see—the dog! Quite a serious piece of business, to be sure. How shall the animal be disposed of? That's a delicate question, for even if we keep him from an attack his racket may arouse the house and precipitate a riot."

"Leave him to me," remarks Campertown.

"Can you manage him?"

"I'm positive of it; brought up among dogs; always knew their tricks; never saw but one I couldn't work to suit me; let that be my share of the elopement, dear boys."

The others are only too glad to have the matter thus disposed of, nor do they doubt the ability of the little man to accomplish what he so confidently takes upon himself.

When the time comes Campertown will in all probability do his share of the work in a manner that may surprise them. Let them look to their own laurels.

By this time the night has fully set in, and many lights have appeared upon the plaza. Bob invites his friends to dine with him, and as they accept, the trio proceed to his hotel, where they are soon seated before the best that money can procure in Algiers.

The conversation is general until Bob has dismissed the waiter, and then, as is natural, the subject most pressing upon their minds comes to the surface again.

Bob notices that the soldier regards him in a peculiar way, and a suspicion finds lodgment within his mind.

"Better have it out, Shack," he says, laughing.

The other makes a show of looking surprised.

"What the deuce do you mean, Bob?" he demands.

"Confession is good for the soul."

"Well?"

"You have something on your mind. Out with it, man. What kept you away from the square this evening, when you knew we'd be anxious?"

Shackelford looks as though he hardly knows whether to be annoyed or not.

"Confound your sharp eyes, Bob! A fellow can't keep a secret from you."

"There's no need, my dear fellow. What ails that arm of yours—the left one?"

"What! You've got on to that also?"

"I noticed you were mighty careful of it, and when I laid my hand on it you pulled away like a man with a boil on his neck. What under the sun have you been up to, Aleck?"

At this the other gives a short laugh.

"I'm at the confessional, eh?"

"Just so."

"And must swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me?"

"Ridiculous, but true," murmurs the Specimen.

"Of course, don't do it if it doesn't concern us," says Bob, hastily.

"Well, both of you have had your turn, and I reckon I'm in for it," the captain replies, grimly.

Monsieur Bob and the little Briton exchange looks of significance; this complication of matters seems to please them rather than otherwise. When men are in a trap it is human to desire company, and they have dreaded the keen satire of the old woman-hater.

Shackelford makes a queer beginning. He proceeds to slowly draw back the left sleeve of his loose, semi-military coat, doing this in a gingerly fashion, as though unwilling to inflict unnecessary pain upon himself.

This action speedily reveals the fact that he has something tied around his arm. Bob and Felix bend forward to scrutinize, while the other sits there like a martyr.

"Bless my soul, a handkerchief!" gasps Bob.

"By Jove! A delicate cobweb—a perfumed atom of lace worth carrying by a princess—perfumed with intoxicating attar of roses—yes, a lady's kerchief, as sure as fate!" breathes Felix.

Shackelford, the old war-dog, chuckles as though it is a great joke, while he carefully draws down his sleeve again. He knows the others are very anxious to hear his story, but, having the advantage, does not mean to hurry.

Leaning back in his chair, he takes a glance around to see that they are not near any persons whose ears might pick up what he is about to say, and then proceeds:

"Perhaps either of you gentlemen may be a scoffer at fate and its mysterious working. If so I'd like you to explain certain facts connected with this case.

"When I left you, Campertown, this afternoon, it was really on what might be called a trivial errand—at least I never suspected I would meet my fate by carrying out a notion. That is where destiny took hold of me, you see."

"Destiny be hanged! I believe a man carves out his fortunes by his good right arm," says Monsieur Bob, with enthusiasm.

"Very good, my dear fellow, but I've seen some queer things in my time that corroborate my ideas. I could tell half a dozen instances that I have in mind, to prove it."

"For Heaven's sake, don't do it!" groans Bob.

"Now, there was the time—"

"Stick to your text—ridiculous waste of time—we've got an amazing amount of work to do!" breaks in the little Briton.

The soldier smiles, but yields the point.

"I reserve these odd instances to a more convenient season, and go to facts. I remembered the widow of an old friend, a Colonel Acton, whose death came about through injuries received at the storming of Alexandria. I had faithfully promised to run out and see her before I left Algiers, and, as I am a man of my word, I was glad to find I would have good time to make the trip between the hour I left Camp, here, and evening.

"I spent a short time with the widow, talking over the time Joe and myself were together, for you know we stood shoulder to shoulder at the great battles around Plevna, when the Russians charged like demons, and the Turks broke line to meet the enemy half way, so eager they were for the battle.

"At last I knew I ought to go, and bade the widow of my old friend good-bye. Then I set out to join you both on the square.

"My errand had taken me out of the city proper, and I found myself on the road where a number of veiled Moorish ladies were coming down from a cemetery, where I suppose, as is the custom here, they had been spending the day. Besides, there were Arab women and bare-footed Kabyls, the latter of whom, you know, do not hide their ugly faces on the street.

"I noticed three hang-dog looking men lurking at a certain point; they were there when I went past before, and on my return I again set eyes on them. It struck me that they could not be here after any good, especially when I saw a number of horses tied amid a thicket of aloes near by.

"They paid no attention to me, probably disdaining to notice an infidel dog. Just at this moment a lady, whose rich apparel indicated her position, came along, a servant following behind. Of course she was dressed as they all are, but you know it is easy to tell a rich Moorish lady; some of them wear diamonds, although, generally, all these things are kept for the home; but you know contact with European ladies is bound to give 'em new ideas.

"I was struck with the grace of this lady's carriage, and although I couldn't see her face on account of the abominable *foutah*, I was ready to swear that one who had the form of a Hebe must also possess a lovely countenance."

Monsieur Bob coughs; he already sees light ahead, and it pleases him. Oh, what a joke it is to see this old woman-hater in the toils at last!

Shackelford casts a quizzical glance in his direction, but has evidently made up his mind to unbosom himself, for he continues with the same resolute determination that has always marked his career as a soldier.

"It was just as I had expected; these three scoundrels were lying in wait to kidnap a woman in broad daylight, which proves that they do not fear the law, and must belong to the desert riders who laugh the French to scorn.

"The first thing I heard was a scream from the Arab maid following behind her mistress, and as I wheeled, bless my soul if the fellows hadn't thrown some sort of blanket over the lady, and were hurrying her off to the horses.

"That was as plain an invitation as ever I had in all my life, and I tell you, gentlemen, the blood leaped in me like molten lava when I realized the audacity of the thing.

"I sailed in; we had a hot little time of it—quite an interesting engagement! One of the chaps foolishly banged his head against my fist, and I plainly heard it crack; at any rate he turned a complete somersault and rolled into the ditch, where he lies yet, unless rescued.

"The fellow who was making off with the lady realized the gravity of the situation, for he dropped his burden and joined his remaining comrade in a rush.

"I met 'em half way, and for about ten seconds we had the loveliest time imaginable. I left the print of my fingers on one chap's throat, and got the other fellow's head in chancery, pummeling him, while he roared and shrieked for mercy. I reckon they got all they wanted of Aleck Shackelford; at any rate, the next thing I knew they were on a couple of horses and going over the country of Sahel like demons.

"The field being cleared, I gallantly assisted the confused lady to arise, and drew the blanket away with which they had half strangled her. In so doing her veil was also dragged off, and my ravished eyes looked on a face that sent my poor bachelor heart to throbbing like a volcano! A face for a Meissonier to paint—undoubtedly the loveliest in the world!"

"I knew it," mutters Bob.

"You ridiculous turncoat," chuckles Felix, endeavoring to punch the captain in the ribs with his huge cane, and then suddenly ceasing his efforts as he remembers the awful results of his last attempt in that line. "By Jove! I forgot that I haven't my glass in position; it won't do to be careless in these desperate times."

"Joke away, boys, I'm one of you now; I confess it, with pleasure. Yes, I fell dead in love at first sight. Lucky dog that I was to have even a fleeting look at that divine face, before the abominable veil was readjusted.

"To proceed; you can understand that by this time there was quite a little excitement around that region—women shrieking and clustering about, while some French soldiers, running up, surrounded me, acting under the belief that I was the cause of the tumult.

"What they would have done I don't know, but just then the beauty whom I had had the pleasure to rescue from those fiends of Arabs turned upon them, and in the purest French explained what had occurred.

"If I was pleased with her face and figure, I was charmed by her voice and manner. I was bound to know more of her, and upon my soul felt sorry that I meant so soon to leave Algiers!"

"Oh! That didn't last," said Bob contemptuously.

"That's just about where you strike it square in the center, my dear fellow," continues the soldier, coolly. "You see, I was desirous of finding out her identity, and to get away from the crowd, so like any other man I asked to see her home. You never yet saw a foreigner walking with a Moorish lady on the street, and I was doubtful about her granting my request, but bless you, she did!

"I found by this time that I was hurt—didn't know it before, I assure you. One of those beasts of pirates must have stuck me with a knife of some sort, for there was a hole in my arm below the elbow. She saw me wipe the blood away with my handkerchief, and nothing would do but that one of the Frenchmen, whom she seemed to know as a surgeon, should examine the cut.

"He stopped the bleeding with some salve he had on his person, and when he asked for something to bandage the arm, bless my soul if she didn't wrap that cobweb around it! Money couldn't buy that from Aleck Shackelford! When she tied that around his arm she gave him a wound worse than the one she cured—a wound that will prove a fatal malady, I reckon!"

"Heart disease generally is, dear boy. Ridiculously romantic—do proceed," says Felix, happy in the thought that the same terrible malady has beset them all alike.

"It is soon done. I walked home with her; she lived in the native quarter, of course. I knew it was time I sought my friends, but believed they would pardon me for once. I met my charmer's father, heard him bless me as the savior of his beloved child, once again feasted my eyes upon her beauty, and finally tore myself away, promising Abdul—"

"Abdul!" almost shrieks the Specimen, sitting bolt upright and staring hard at the captain.

"Of course," returns that worthy, "that's where the hand of destiny comes in! The girl was Zella!"

"Count me a believer in destiny, after this. That floors me, I vow!" says Felix feebly.

"You can imagine my delight when I discovered this fact. It seemed as though everything was bound to come out just right. I no longer had any inclination to resist the decree Monsieur Bob had laid upon me, but obeyed his order, and not only fell in love, but tumbled headlong into the chasm."

"What more could be expected when a man goes fifty years without ever having once suffered an attack of the divine fever? If it ever does come it will down him like a baby; all his vaunted strength, all his former scoffs and raillery will only contribute to make his fall the more speedy," says wise Monsieur Bob, from his standpoint of thirty-three.

"I believe you, Bob, old fellow; I haven't a word to say in my behalf. Consider me a fellow sufferer from the shafts of Cupid. Here we are, three men in the same boat; let each believe his inamorata the fairest in the world, and then wish success to the others. My yarn is done. It is now seven o'clock, and, as we have a mighty serious bit of business before us this night, I move that all levity be foresworn, also allusions to the past, and let each man, in his own peculiar way, put his shoulder to the wheel."

"Well said, Captain. The immediate future has enough of trouble in store for us without bringing up the past. That will do to joke about when we are lying around upon the deck of the *Skip-jack*, taking a sun bath, with the trio of fair ladies near by to gladden our eyes."

"Bob, dear boy, forbear. The picture you present is only too exceedingly charming. My heart grows cold when I think of the chances we take. To wear, we must first win," bursts out Felix.

"Listen to the philosopher laying down the law! You have as many sides to your character as a dice, Campertown—clown, duelist, schemer, philosopher, and Heaven knows not what!"

"Not coward or villain, I trust," remarks Felix, softly.

"Never. There's more bravery to the square inch in that small body of yours than most men can show," cries Bob, warmly.

And so they sit and talk and plan for nearly half an hour longer. The smallest details are gone into, and each man knows his part, so that when these are put together the machine is bound to run smoothly unless something which can not be foreseen gets in the way.

It is really a solemn conference, for much depends upon the result of their work. Finally they separate, to go different ways, each with a grim determination to bring success if it is to be attained through any individual effort upon his part.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE RISING OF THE MOON.

Each has his duty to perform, and perhaps none can be more important than that of the old soldier. His mind has not lain idle ever since he found himself commissioned to procure a rope ladder twenty-five feet long, but he has already in his mind managed the details of the matter.

Such a thing it is utterly out of the question to think of buying—it must be manufactured. To get the material is what bothers him. In an American city he would have known just where to go, but it is a different thing in an Algerian town after nightfall.

Already he has in mind two places, at one of which he may be successful. Rope is not needed; that is only a name for it. What he especially desires is a quantity of heavy twine, about the heaviest that is made into balls. Such stuff would hold the weight of two men, and surely it could not break when Nina trusted herself to it.

As soon as he parts from his companions the old soldier heads for a certain bazar near by, where all manner of things are offered for sale by the shrewd Turk who runs the establishment.

This will not be Shackelford's first trip to the place, as he has bought tobacco here, and also a number of small things. It strikes him that he can remember seeing a quantity of balls of heavy twine dangling in one corner of the bazar, which would suit his purpose. Even if too weak, he can double the cord.

Fortune is kind, for he finds just what he wants exactly. He invests and sits down to his work then and there.

The Turk is interested, and Shackelford gives him a hint that he is about to run away with a charming girl. Although this is a curious thing to the Oriental, who is in the habit of buying all the wives he cares to keep, it strikes his interest by its novelty, and he offers several suggestions which Shackelford takes advantage of, proving that in most of the affairs of life two heads are better than one.

His manner of going about the job is peculiar. First he lays two side ropes, nearly thirty feet in length. Beginning at one end, he ties crosspieces about a foot long, in spaces of some fifteen inches. As these have to be knotted to the sides, it is something of a tedious job. It takes some twenty of them to fill the bill, for the side ropes shorten after many knots have been tied in them.

Finally this part of the captain's job is completed, but Shackelford is not done. He fastens several light but strong pieces of steel across, so as to keep the ladder in shape as much as possible. If he had the time and means he would arrange the top after the manner in vogue with fire ladders, but as it is, plenty of cord must do instead.

When the thing is done Shackelford has a feeling of intense pride. He surveys his handiwork critically, and tests every knot. Even this is not enough, and he makes a suggestion to the Turk, who grins and acquiesces.

Together they proceed above, and the new ladder is fastened securely. Then the old war-dog runs up and down with the agility of a veteran fireman. Nothing gives, and there is one proud man in the city of Algiers that night.

He now makes it up into a compact package, being careful to arrange it so that there will be no twisting. Then he ties a piece of black cloth around the whole; paper would not do, even if he could get it, as the rustling and rattling of a stiff newspaper might be the cause of their detection in the garden of Osman Digna.

Then Shackelford pays the Turk a price that makes that worthy put his tongue into his left cheek after the manner of a pleased Oriental, and wish the veteran all success in his enterprise.

Shackelford still has time on his hands before going to the rendezvous, but as his preparations have all been made, he feels that it might be wise for him to head in that direction. While he thus passes on it might be well to see how the other conspirators manage.

Monsieur Bob heads for the quay when he leaves his friends, and soon draws near the spot where, if his orders have been carried out, he will find the boat.

All is darkness now.

As his eyes fail to discover the object they seek, he finally gives a little whistle.

This has the desired effect. A human form comes toward him.

"That you, Mr. Crane?" asks a low voice.

"On deck here; where's the boat?"

"Just to the left, sir. We found a little steamer lands where you arranged to have us stay. Here we are, sir," and the English sailor points down to where a dark object rises and falls on the waves.

"That voice sounds like John Burrows."

"True for you, sir," replies the other.

"Good! You have taken some one off, John?"

"A gentleman and his daughter—a Moor, I reckon, from his talk. They mentioned your name. It was just after dark. One trunk they brought. Several servants carried it, sir."

"And they are on board the yacht?"

"Ay, ay, sir, safe and sound. The captain's eyes stuck out when he saw 'em. Bless me, how he swore under his breath!"

"He will swear harder than that before I'm through with him, Captain Burrows."

"Sir!" stammers the honest sailor, aghast.

"I said, Captain Burrows. I mean it. From this hour you are captain of the yacht, though not a soul must know it until I give the word. Let Paxton have enough rope to hang himself."

"God bless you, sir! Not a word shall escape my lips. This will be brave news for my dear old mother. Will you kindly let me shake hands with you, sir?"

Bob accommodates him with a grip he is likely to remember, although he does not wince.

"I have come down here to change your location, Burrows. There is a little cove that is much more convenient for my purpose. I purpose now to go with you and take you to the spot."

"Very good, sir."

"Was there sail on the yacht when you left?"

"Yes, sir. While we were getting the old Moor and his daughter the captain had been at it, and now the yacht lies at anchor with all her canvas afloat."

"The breeze is favorable, too?"

"A gentle sou-east, with an inclination to dip further south. Could n't be better, sir."

"Ah, the gods favor us! I will embark, Burrows."

In another minute Monsieur Bob has entered the boat, and is gliding slowly along, the craft keeping close to the shore.

Thus they move, more like a phantom boat than a real one, until Bob knows from various signs that they are nearing the place he seeks. Then his caution increases, and finally they enter a small cove. Here the boat is secured, and Bob gives directions which the two sailors are to keep before their minds.

He is ready for business now, and as he makes his way toward the rendezvous, Bob finds himself in a fever of impatience. The time is near at hand when everything must be staked on the turn of a die. Thoughts which have not worried him before now arise to bother him. Perhaps the enemy has not been idle. The man he feels most uneasy about is Musta-el-Gaber. Is that worthy on the watch? He may have had his suspicions aroused by

Bob's actions at the time the latter received the love-letter over the garden wall.

Bob grows more anxious with the flight of each passing minute, for he realizes that it brings them nearer the climax. His fate will be decided ere long. All the same he retains a wonderful amount of coolness, for it is not his nature to become broken up simply because danger shows her red flag.

The rendezvous at last!

He gives the signal and receives an answer. It is Shackelford's tall, soldierly form that rises to meet him, and the veteran's cheery voice that rings in his ears.

He learns with pleasure that the rope ladder is no longer a figure of speech, but a reality—that Shackelford carries it under his arm.

"Feel it, my boy; light enough, yet strong; yes, it would bear you and I together. No danger of a wreck; we'll have 'em both out, Bob, and by midnight be safe on board, outward bound."

This sort of talk cheers Bob up; Heaven knows he has need of being cheered. They fall to comparing notes, and Bob tells how the boat is now much closer than before. He explains how it can be reached, for it may be some freak of fortune might separate them, and each have to go upon his own hook.

Then they fall to wondering where Campertown can be. Somehow they feel a deep solicitude about the peculiar little Briton. Odd genius that he is, he has a heart of gold, and more than once his actions have proved this in the past.

Still he does not show up. The time draws near the appointed hour. They begin to feel worried lest some accident may have befallen him.

The moon peeps into view.

Bob growls to himself, and moves restlessly.

"All will be spoiled if he fails us," he laments.

"No, we will simply go without him. Perhaps in trying to subdue the hound he has fallen into the clutches of the master," suggests the captain, who philosophically smokes as he waits.

"Then we would have to rescue him. I could n't go off and leave a man like Camp in trouble."

"He's coming," says the other, quietly.

"How d'ye know, Aleck?"

"My cigar has lost its flavor—bah!" and he tosses the fragrant weed aside.

Monsieur Bob "catches on," as it were; he uses his olfactories with a definite result.

"Ah! I comprehend; the odor of his villainous cigarette precedes him!" he laughs.

"Ridiculously cruel, dear boy—a slander on the cherished idol of my fancy. But then some people don't know a good thing when they smell it. Here I am on deck, fellows, and none too soon."

The voice is succeeded by the Specimen himself, coolly advancing from out of the shadows. He looks just the same as usual, only Bob has an idea his garments do not set so neatly. Campertown has been to the war.

Briefly Bob tells him where the boat now lies, and describes how it can be reached. Then the captain holds up his package and informs the little Briton that the rope ladder is there, ready for the business in hand.

They await his report, which is of much interest to them because a great deal depends upon the quieting of the dog in the garden. The Honorable Felix chuckles a little and tells his tale.

He has secured, first of all, a piece of meat. Then at an apothecary shop some strychnine is bought. A combination of these two are guaranteed to knock out the stoutest dog in all Algeria, and in an incredibly short space of time.

Thus armed and equipped Campertown had made his way toward the scene of action. He found the remnant of the old tower, and climbed upward, just as Bob had done. Fortunately he was something of an acrobat, though so small, and after some manipulation managed to reach the top.

Perhaps his progress had been marked by some sounds that were apt to reach sharp ears. At any rate, when he came to look over the wall of the garden he heard low growling, and could see a pair of yellow glaring eyes that seemed to be watching him intently.

This pleased Campertown immensely. He coolly cut a piece from the chunk of doctored meat, took aim as well as he could in the darkness, and tossed it over the wall.

The yellow eyes vanished for a minute; he believed he heard certain sounds that indicated success, and then once more the glaring orbs appeared, if possible more eager and snappy than ever.

Felix repeated the performance, and soon had the dog trained so that he caught the pieces on the fly; after each throw would come a strange noise, not unlike a frog leaping into a pond, and then the eyes would ask for more.

When Campertown had thus disposed of his stock, he began to think about getting down. As with Bob, it was easier to climb up than to descend; but fortune was kind. He only fell when near the bottom, and did not hurt himself to any extent. The balance of his adventures had better be told in his own peculiar, jerky fashion.

"Thought that was the end of it; bless you, dear boys, it was only a starter! Ridiculous, too; it was a dog that took me there, and a dog that got me into difficulty. You see it was infernally dark. I managed to run across a cur. By Jove! he gave me a start; ran out and snapped at my legs in an audacious manner.

"Well, that was past enduring, so I gave him the benefit of a kick; you see, I used to play foot ball at Rugby; I'm something of a rusher, if I do say it myself. Jove! I never made a neater kick in all my blessed life! The little cur sailed over a wall, yelping like mad. That was all very fine, but out rushes a man and proceeds to do me up for murdering his dog.

"I objected, gentlemen, the best I knew how, and showed the ruffian that I had taken boxing lessons at Oxford. We had a lovely scrap; I went over twice, but was up like a wink and hammering away.

"Jove! I brought him to terms, dear boys; I had him on his knees, the big bully, begging my pardon! He even invited me to come and kick his dog whenever I took the notion; said it would be good for the saucy little cur; he'd learn to let gentlemen alone on the street.

"After this affair was over I felt that I needed some attention, for I had bled my man by a lucky up stroke, and—well, you see I wasn't in a presentable condition to appear before my adorable Nanette. So, dear boys, I hied me away to my rooms and washed up. Then I set out for the place of meeting, and here we are."

Monsieur Bob and Shackelford express their pleasure at the probable success of their plans, for it really looks as though they have everything running about as they could wish. It is not given to us mortals to raise the curtain and look into the future. There are times when we believe it would be greatly to our advantage if we could only know how events were about to shape themselves, so that we might prepare to receive them.

The black wall of the future, which only retreats before the advance of the present, conceals the destinies of all men, and to no human soul is given the power to pierce its hidden recesses.

"We must be on the move," says Shackelford, as he rises to his feet.

His words electrify the others; they mean that the time for action has come, when they must put their fate to the test and dare all.

* * *

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT CAME DOWN THE CAPTAIN'S ROPE LADDER.

Three desperate men thus begin to make their way toward the hill of Mustapha Superieur, their minds bent upon a double elopement. It is a charming night—too bright to suit their purposes, and they welcome each cloud that passes over the face of the moon. Never in all their lives have they been more on the alert, for with two of them, at least, the results of this strange adventure mean life long happiness in case of success, or regret should failure come.

Even the veteran is deeply interested. There was a time, not so very far back either, when he would have been amazed to have found himself engaged in any such work as assisting in an elopement, but times have changed, and the old woman-hater is being led a captive, bound by the silken web of Cupid's weaving. Things look very different to him now. The appearance of anything always depends upon the vantage spot from whence it is surveyed.

Agreed to do their utmost to make the game a success, the trio move forward to the assault. They fear no foe; all they ask is the favor of fortune in permitting them to get the ladies safely out of the Castle Despair. When that has been accomplished they stand ready to carve a passage through serried ranks of enemies if need be in order to finish their work.

The garden wall looms up before them, gloomy and forbidding, but it does not daunt their brave hearts. On one side is the ruined tower. From what he has heard of this Shackelford believes he can make use of his rope ladder.

He whispers to Bob, who catches on to the idea instantly, and, leaving Felix below, the two begin to climb the old tower. Once at the top it is Shackelford's idea to remove the three rods of steel from the rope ladder, and cast this latter after the manner of a lasso over the stone wall, until the loops get entangled in the bushes beyond. Then, while Bob holds the other end, he will cross by this bridge, formed in the African way Stanley tells us about, until at last he finds himself perched upon the wall. After that it will be easy to drop the ladder to the Specimen below, and both he and Bob can mount at their leisure.

All this is due to Shackelford, for it is his inventive genius that has designed the plan. It is successful, too. The captain has perhaps tossed the lasso in some of his past years; at any rate he manipulates the rope with a dexterity no amateur could show.

Of course much of the casting is done in a hap-hazard way, for, although the moon shines, they can only see the bushes beyond the wall, and have no way of distinguishing any projection upon which the loops may catch.

Shackelford is persistent; one failure does not daunt him, nor half a dozen, for that matter. He keeps sending the rope out, trying all along the garden wall, until at length it fails to slip off—something has caught the loop.

Testing it first, he finds that it holds; pull as he may he cannot tear it loose.

"That settles it; take hold, Bob; I depend on you, at any rate. It would be an ugly tumble down there on those rocks," he says, and Bob thinks so, too, for he is determined that, come what will, nothing shall tear his end loose.

Shackelford's method is peculiar, and yet shows the wisdom of a long head. He straddles the rope ladder with his face toward Bob. There is a purpose in this; if either end goes it will be the one over the wall, and in the event of such an accident he desires to drop feet down, holding on to the ladder. This will only swing him against the ruined tower.

His progress is downward, as Bob's position is higher than the top of the wall. The latter keeps his eyes fixed on the veteran; he sees him glide along; now he reaches the middle, and, pausing not, pushes on for the promised land.

A minute of suspense and he has backed up against the wall; at last he creeps upon the stones. Then a low whistle sounds, and obeying the signal Bob lowers his end of the ladder to the ground by means of a guy-rope.

Again he has to descend that uncanny place, where a tumble is always so imminent. His former experience stands him in good service now, however, for he remembers just where this loose stone lies, and how he put his foot into this or that hole; in the course of a few minutes he has made the descent without a single accident occurring.

He finds Campertown has drawn the ladder over against the wall, and all is in readiness for them to make the effort. Before a word can be said, the little Briton squeezes Bob's arm as though he desires to whisper in his ear.

"Bend down, dear boy," he breathes, and wondering, the other obeys, for it is evident the Specimen has some communication to make which he deems of importance.

"While you were aloft, and I crouched down at the foot of the tower, bless my soul, an Arab came along! Saw him look up; Shack was walking the tight rope, just then, as pretty a sight, by Jove, as ever I set eyes on!"

"Continue, Camp—time flies," says Bob, whose interest has at once been arrested, as though he realizes that this incident must have a bearing on the final results of their project.

"I heard him mutter something in his infernal jargon, and then he walked off," says the Briton.

"Which way?"

"Up the hill."

"Exactly; he may have gone to arouse her uncle. Was he close to you, Felix?"

"So close that I was tempted to knock the rascal on the head! Fact; I would have done so, had I possessed a good stout cudgel."

"It's a pity."

"Ridiculous fool-play on my part. Of course I ought to have stunned him, but, dear boy, I don't possess the arm of steel you boast, and if I failed to knock him out in the first round his Arab yells would have aroused Bedlam."

"True, true; can't be helped, Felix, old chap. Come, here's the rope—up you go. We'll hope for the best."

Bob endeavors to speak cheerily, although in his anxiety he feels as though a heavy weight were tied about his neck. When disasters accumulate, this man's nature, instead of bowing before the storm, will rise defiant to the last. He is not made of yielding timber.

The Specimen waits for no second invitation, but proceeds to climb; he is already part way up the face of the wall, as the coping of the latter serves to keep the rope-ladder several inches away from the surface, and allows of the hands and feet taking a good hold.

When he crawls over the top Bob begins to mount upward. Although much heavier than the little Briton, he is at the same time a wonderful athlete, and the manner in which he makes that ascent is simply superb.

It is honest Shackelford's hand that assists him over the top of the wall, and thus the three daring adventurers find themselves sprawling there with about half of their work accomplished.

The captain is groping about the bushes, and, finding where the loops have caught, proceeds to prune the twigs with his knife, speedily releasing his wonderful rope ladder, which he gathers up in his hands.

Meanwhile Bob and the Specimen have been using their eyes, hoping to discover the dog lying near by, for such ocular evidence would be positive proof that they need have no fear of being disturbed in this quarter; but their best efforts fail to materialize the victim of Campertown's ingenious device.

It is time to "get off the fence." Bob swings over and allows his feet to touch *terra firma*, not knowing but what a dog's teeth may meet in the calf of his leg the next instant; but fortunately no such electrifying process takes place, and the other two adventurous pilgrims speedily join him.

The wall is not so high inside; about five or six feet in all, so that those within can enjoy the view of the harbor, with the changeful blue sea throbbing beyond.

Now comes the tug of war. Under trees and beside rose bushes that grow riotously in this sunny clime where winter's heavy breath never comes the three prowlers make their way, heading in the direction of the grim building, glimpses of which they catch now and then.

It is close by, and the moonlight glances along the walls, here painting them with a lavish hand and anon allowing a dark shadow to mark the line of some projection.

At the further end is a sort of tower, and here they can see the moon's rays glinting from some polished metal; it is an alarm bell that hangs there. Pray Heaven its wild clangor may not peal out upon the solemn air of this night! That is the thought in Monsieur Bob's mind when his eyes take in the belfry tower.

Flitting along like grim specters, the three figures at length find themselves close to the Moorish house, which stands at the end of the garden.

Bob's eager eyes range along the wall and take in the second story, which could be called the third, because the ground, in sloping, raises it higher than on the other side.

He counts the windows from the end. Ah! the marked embrasure lies in a shadow, for a projecting wall stands between it and the moon. This is a fact that pleases our friends when they discover it. If the moon were blotted out entirely just at this time, no one would hear any mourning from that quarter. True, the heavenly luminary has its uses, but they do not come to the surface during a romantic elopement; darkness is the best friend of lovers, who thus defy the power of guardians and take their fate into their own hands.

Having thus selected the aperture at which Nina and her maid are to appear, the little party move to get beneath it.

As yet no sound that can be construed into a bark or a growl; it really and truly begins to look as though the worthy Felix must have succeeded in giving the fierce hound a dose that has stiffened him out in some corner. The only thing Shackelford fears is that it may have been an overdose, which would act as an emetic.

Even this doubting Thomas begins to have faith in Campertown's scheme as the minutes pass by and no outburst of howls attests the presence of the canine foe in the flesh.

Monsieur Bob drags out his watch; the moonlight falls directly upon it.

"Just one minute of eleven," he whispers, hoarsely.

"Surprisingly clever," remarks milord, in a semi-tone, referring, doubtless, to the fact that they have hit the appointed time so remarkably close.

Bob gropes along the wall in the lines bounded by the shadow, while Shackelford unpacks his bundle and gets the wonderful little rope ladder in readiness for immediate use. The Specimen simply bends his head back and gazes with enthralled devotion at the faintly seen window above through which those they would rescue must come.

Bob gropes in vain.

They hear a great clock in a church strike the hour of eleven. Felix has discovered a movement above—he is sure one or more heads have appeared at the window, and, demonstrative by nature, he steps back so that the full light of the moon falls upon his noble figure, assumes his favorite attitude, and then waves a snowy kerchief. He makes one of the greatest sacrifices of his life in preserving the peace, for it is on the tip of his tongue to give a genuine British cheer.

Again Monsieur Bob gropes for the cord they are to lower, for he, too, has discovered the presence of heads above. This time he finds what he seeks, and quickly it is attached to the end of the rope ladder—that end which has been arranged so that it can be tied to some object in the room above.

Shackelford has arranged the steel cross bars, and he now gives a gentle tug at the cord. It is answered, and those above begin to haul in the slack. Thus the rope ladder starts to mount upward; it looks as though success might be almost within their grasp.

Their nerves are strained to the utmost, and as the rope ladder reaches the window they seem hardly to breathe, such is their anxiety. Then comes a period of intense suspense, while those above are making the ladder secure.

What is that? A whisper floats down along the wall to the listening ears below.

"Monsieur Bob!"

"Yes—what is it?" he breathes back, thrilled by the mention of his name from that source.

Again it comes, clear and distinct, yet like a faint zephyr stealing in from the sea.

"It is secured; test the ladder, my Bob!"

He places his weight upon it; joy, it holds! It is secure for their descent. The fact is conveyed to those above. Immediately a figure is dimly seen in the darkness; they hear a half suppressed little shriek, the ladder trembles, and in ten seconds Bob clasps a form in his arms. Confusion! It is Nanette! He turns her over to the eager Campertown, and again waits.

The ladder once more vibrates—Nina comes. How oppressively still everything is. It seems as though in this dread minute of suspense Bob can hear his heart beat; the sound is like that of a bass drum. He sees the dark form above swing clear; it begins to descend. As though this act were in itself a signal the silence of the night hour is rudely broken, and suddenly there rings out the wild clangor of the alarm bell in the tower; loud voices are heard, coupled with the savage baying of a dog. Monsieur Bob hears and grits his teeth, for he knows that the cloak of secrecy may no longer hide them, but they must fight for their lives!

BOOK THREE.

Destiny, Written on the Rocks of Vesuvius.

CHAPTER I.

SHACKELFORD AT BAY.

This sudden change from silence to the wild pandemonium that marks the alarm is indeed startling, to say the least. Bob's heart almost stands still, not with fright, for he is incapable of feeling that, but overwhelmed by apprehension concerning the safety of the one he loves so well.

When the disturbance thus rudely breaks out upon the night air, Nina is perhaps half way down the rope ladder. This means that she is still some ten feet from the ground.

Monsieur Bob becomes alarmed lest the racket which bursts upon her ears may cause the young girl to release her clutch upon the ropes. Perhaps persons who ought to be depended on better than Nina, would lose their presence of mind under such peculiar circumstances.

All he can do is to brace himself, with outstretched arms, beneath, ready to catch her should she come, and thus break the fall.

Above the fiendish clamor his voice is heard.

"Continue to descend, Nina, darling! I am here waiting for you! Fear not—but come!"

She hears, and receives new courage, for at the outbreak of the affair she had hesitated whether to continue her downward flight. If Monsieur Bob awaits her there why need she fear?

So she quickly leaves the balance of the route behind, and is suddenly clasped in his arms, while the captain seizes hold of the rope ladder that has already served them so well. It is his intention to release it from the hold above, for he knows they must have further need of its services. In vain he pulls and tugs; Shackelford is no weakling, but he fails to break the cords by means of which the girls have secured the ladder to some object in the room above.

Campertown sees the dilemma, and springs to his assistance, throwing his whole weight upon the affair, but without accomplishing anything. All this has, of course, occurred in much less time than it takes to tell it; indeed, hardly half a minute has elapsed since the first alarm before the two men are thus tugging to gain possession of the rope ladder.

"Oh! Bob, dear boy," cries Campertown, pulling with might and main, like a little terrier that has his teeth fastened in the dress of a large woman.

The man from Chicago hears a despairing cry; he wheels around, and is able to comprehend what they want of him. Taking one step forward he seizes the rope ladder just above his head. There is one tremendous exertion of his powerful frame, the knotted muscles swell, the back and hips receive their due proportion of the strain, and the thing is done! No ordinary rope could resist such a fearful wrench, and the cords above snap. Down comes the rope ladder in a bunch, and Shackelford utters a fierce hurrah, as though in admiration of Bob's powers.

They must not linger here—it is death to remain! Already hoarse shouts can be heard in the garden, and it is evident that Osman Digna and his men have entered with the fierce intention of murdering any strangers whom they may find there.

"Come! says Bob, resolutely, "we must make haste and get away!"

Shackelford has already secured the rope ladder, so there is apparently nothing to keep them, unless they run across the men who are already wildly scouring the garden. Perhaps it may be unfortunate for these same men if such a collision takes place, for the three who have entered upon this game are well armed, and desperate enough to fight like demons.

The party starts off. As each of the other two has a lady to look after, the soldier of fortune gallantly chooses the post of honor and brings up the rear. He knows when he does it that whatever danger is likely to descend upon them must come from this quarter, but that only serves to make the man more determined. Peril can not daunt the lion; a thousand foes will not make him turn tail and run. He pounces upon a part of the line, rends and tears, carrying terror in his track, and either puts his foes to flight or else meets his death right there.

So Shackelford guards the rear. He carries the rope ladder about his left arm while his right is free for business, and in that hand he clutches a revolver that has never yet failed him in the hour of need.

Thus the little party press along, seeking the shadows when it is possible, and heading for the corner of the garden nearest the old tower. Of course it is impossible for them to remain long hidden from the keen eyes of hate that scour every foot of the garden soil searching for them. Discovery is bound to come. Every one of the three men naturally have their nerves strained to the utmost tension. Indeed, such a fearful clamor must start the blood like hot lava in the veins of the coolest of men.

They have covered about half the distance between the house and the garden wall when the captain realizes that they are discovered. The change in the tone of the yells declares this; they have assumed a more vindictive character, and from various quarters dusky figures can be seen rushing forward.

Shackelford knows that even a man of Osman Digna's prominence would not keep such a retinue of servants, and the suspicion flashes across his mind that these parties must be some of the fierce bandits from the desert, serving under the banner of Musta-el-Gaber. It is reasonable enough, since his suspicions must have been aroused in this quarter. Perhaps the man who saw Shackelford cross from the old tower on the slanting rope ladder was one of these scouts.

It matters not just now; the men are on deck, and they demonstrate the fact that our three friends must look on them as deadly foes. Their actions prove this much.

Shackelford sees more than this. Something rushes along in the van; it is a dog of more than ordinary proportions. Undoubtedly the dose given by Felix was too large, as sometimes happens in such cases, and sickened the brute, so that, retiring to some corner, he had relieved himself of it and lain down to recuperate, until the first stroke of the mad alarm bell brought him up. At any rate the brute now rushes toward the fugitives with a rapidity that proves he has not been entirely denuded of his strength by what he has passed through.

Knowing that this monster is undoubtedly the first upon which he will have to test the efficacy of cold lead, Aleck prepares to receive boarders. His thumb draws back the hammer, his finger touches the trigger, and his quick eye notes the progress which the hound makes.

Obstacles fail to stay the on-rushing brute, whose fierce instincts are all aroused by this daring invasion of his domain. He rushes forward to close with the enemy; perhaps he associates them with the pain he has lately endured, and has a wild desire for revenge.

There is now no further time for retreat, since the hound has cleared the space separating him from the fugitives. He rushes open mouthed upon the one figure that lingers in the rear—lingers in the very hope of just this thing.

Shackelford has swung around to face his brute foe, and one of his arms is extended as though he points toward the hound. The moonlight gleams from polished steel, and what he clasps in his hand he points toward the yelping brute; not a quiver is there in that steady aim, but certain as death itself he presents his trusty revolver at the dog.

Now the animal is not five feet away; he seems to anticipate an easy victory; perhaps his fierce rush has frightened this figure so that the man is incapable of action. That would be a vain delusion on the part of anyone.

One more jump and there must be a contact between man and beast, when the shining teeth of the latter may get in their work; but that last leap is never made a success.

Above the hoarse shouts of the hungry pack of human hunters—above the mad clatter of the alarm bell, still beating its brazen-throated music upon the soft night air, sounds the sharp report of Shackelford's revolver.

Its tenor can not be mistaken, and if anything more is needed to prove the result of this solitary shot it comes in the death howl of the stricken dog, as the brute pitches forward and huddles in a heap at the feet of the man whose leaden messenger has brought the summons of doom.

The mad rush does not cease, for what is the death of a dog to these fierce men? True, the same weapon may presently be turned against them, but they have neither the time nor inclination to stop now in order to figure it out.

As the game is in full sight of the pack of hounds, they generally break into frantic yelps. So with these hunters. Their eagerness is doubled, and they bear down upon the devoted little party like hawks swooping upon a dovecote.

Our friends have meanwhile had a chance to draw near the corner where their hopes lie. Could they be given a few minutes of time the rope ladder might be arranged and all of them effect an escape over the barrier.

Captain Aleck knows that it is now utterly impossible for this to happen unless some unlooked for miracle comes to pass.

He realizes that a meeting between the hostile forces is a certainty, and therefore steadies himself to meet the furious onslaught. Does he mean to stand the brunt of the attack alone? The Specimen feels something thrust into his hands.

"Take the ladder and arrange it, Camp!" shouts a voice in his ear.

Then Campertown knows what his share of the work is to be; he buckles down to it with a determination that success must come.

Shackelford hovers in the rear. The shadowy figures of their pursuers are closing in and forming something of a phalanx; this force is about to be hurled upon them with tremendous power, as if under the orders of a great leader.

He grasps the situation as a military man alone can do; strategic actions are a part of his education, and with the eye of a Sheridan this soldier of fortune knows where he must get his work in if he wants to create a panic, which is about the only thing that will save them.

He can see weapons flashing in the hands of men—the terrible *yataghan* of the Arab is there, eager to drink the blood of infidel dogs. They have planned this elopement under its shadow, and for one, Aleck Shackelford does not fear.

When his eagle eye has selected the spot where he should begin operations he starts firing. His intention is to wound more than to kill, and consequently he aims low, well knowing that these loud-shouting men are far from heroes, and that a bullet in the leg will very probably place any one of them out of the fight.

The rapid detonation of the revolver and the change from yells to shrieks on the part of a number of the attacking force, cause the little affair to assume the proportions of a mimic battle. Shackelford has been in many a desperate situation during that checkered career of his, but it is doubtful whether he has ever been caught in a worse trap than this. Only by pure luck or the especial favor of Providence can they hope to escape.

Perhaps Aleck might, alone and unaided, have hurled the enemy back, had their numbers been less, or their leader lacking in daredevil courage. Musta-el-Gaber is here, and such a scene is to him high carnival; he rejoices in the roar of battle—in the flash of murderous *yataghan* as it cleaves human heads, or the sharp report of gun fire. To him it is mad music, urging him on to reckless deeds.

His inspiring shouts urge on the others; they dare not fall back while this man leads. Besides, there is apparently but one enemy opposed to them—a man who stands there as coolly as a monument of ice, and, with blazing revolver in one hand and naked knife in the other, resolutely awaits their advance.

Surely they can overwhelm him, by the mere weight of numbers if nothing else. Besides, his revolver must be nearly exhausted by this time, when they will be placed upon a more even footing with their enemy.

This serves to keep the squad intact, save for the few who have dropped out to nurse their wounds, and hobble about in the delirium of pain. As the last shot belches from the soldier's weapon, there is heard an avalanche of yells, and the whole party of Arabs, with waving fists and *yataghans* rush forward and surround the indomitable man.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESERT TIGER HAS HIS CLAWS CUT.

These events have taken place so rapidly that the others have just reached the wall when the desperate rush is made. Monsieur Bob knows what that means, and his nature will not let him keep back from the fray longer. Shackelford must not sacrifice himself in order to save his friends.

"Get the ladies over the wall, Camp, in all haste," he shouts to his companion.

"And you?" asks the little Briton, as he sees the American about to turn back.

"My place is with *him*," comes the answer.

Bob has pressed a hasty kiss upon the cheek of Nina, and is gone from their view, flashing through a patch of moonlight as though gifted with the winged feet of the god Mercury.

Shackelford has met the combined attack of his foes with a sublime courage that does not flinch before overwhelming numbers. He may meet his fate then and there, but if it comes he will receive it in the same brave manner that marks his every move.

The very first man who rushes at him has a white skin; perhaps he may be the Italian count whom Nanette fears, the lover of Marhara, the Arab beauty. Shackelford never stops for an introduction, but hurls his empty and now useless revolver with tremendous force directly in the fellow's face. He stretches out his arms wildly, staggers and falls. Aleck does not know at the time whether he is merely stunned or killed by the crashing blow, but later on he has cause to wish his arm had been twice as powerful when the weapon left it.

Now the Arabs are around him like a pack of mongrel curs; the sight might remind some old sportsman of a bear at bay, with the dogs assailing it on every side; they strike at the soldier, they pull at him, and endeavor to close, but this his ready arms keep them from doing.

It is a strange spectacle, and a desperate one, too, for if once these dark-skinned men succeed in grasping his arms little chance remains for Aleck to ward off the fatal keen-edged *yataghan* that hovers near, eager to decapitate him.

One man can hardly baffle a dozen, no matter how stout his heart may be, and in a very brief space of time the Arabs have crowded so close around the stalwart soldier that he is unable to longer keep them at bay. It looks as though doom must be upon him.

At this moment, above the roar of jabbering tongues, comes a voice that sounds like music to the ears of the beleaguered Aleck.

"Keep it up, old man! Don't let them down you yet! One more gallant break and we have the game! Hold out, my boy, for I'm coming like a Texas tornado!"

With the last word there bursts into view a flying figure, advancing with huge bounds that carry him over the ground at an astonishing rate.

This is Monsieur Bob.

It is good for sore eyes to see him thus rushing to the fray with all the eagerness of a bridegroom advancing to meet his bride. Space is annihilated under his feet.

When he strikes the mass of Arabs clustered about the defiant Shackelford it is like the concussion that follows the mad plunge of *toro* dashing among the cowardly *chulos* who gather with their darts and red flags in the ring to exasperate and play with the bull.

Right and left they fly. Monsieur Bob's terrible arm now doubles one man up ten feet away, under the impression that the heels of a mule are somehow connected with his downfall, while another is sent spinning madly around in a dizzy waltz that would make a dancing dervish green with jealousy, until some tree offers a chance of collision, and he sits down to reflect upon the magnitude of the heavens and the brilliancy of the stars he has seen.

Bone and sinew Monsieur Bob throws into the game; he is fighting for the life of his friend now; he is battling also for Nina and all his future hopes of happiness in her society.

Could a man, a brave man, have more of an incentive to push him forward?

Nor is Shackelford idle during this display of courage and strength on the part of his friend, though he has about all he can do to keep that *yataghan* from cleaving him. Twice has he caught vicious blows meant for his head upon his trusty knife blade, but this can not always be depended on.

He knows something must be done to prevent this man from making a third and probably successful attempt. Therefore, hardly has he warded off the half-sword for the second time than he himself becomes the assailant, and rushing forward, closes with his would-be assassin. At close quarters the knife is better than the *yataghan*, and when the Arab receives a puncture in the arm he drops his weapon and struggles to break away from the soldier's hold.

Shackelford is only too willing to let the terrified man go, and with a quick swoop possesses himself of the Arab's fallen weapon.

With something that will answer the purpose of a sword in his hand the soldier is in high clover—he feels more like himself again.

Monsieur Bob's iron arm has made sad havoc with the fellows who get in its way; his fist is like a sledge hammer that trips each unlucky devil up and lands him dazed and out of the fight several yards away.

When the two unite in a last grand rally the remainder of the pack turn to fly, terror having come upon them at sight of the astonishing achievements of this wonderful unbeliever.

All but one man, who stands there firm as the rocks of the snow-capped Djara Djura, in the Atlas mountains.

It is Musta-el-Gaber, the scourge of the desert, who thus scorns to fly. As Monsieur Bob rushes up to him he laughs aloud, makes some mocking remark, and presents a pistol at the breast of the advancing Chicagoan, but the weapon scorns to take the life of a brave man; the hammer falls without a report following. With an awful curse el-Gaber raises his arm to hurl the weapon at his foe, but Bob has rushed in; his terrible right swings forward with the force of a young cyclone, beating down the guard offered by the upraised arm of the Arab, and smiting the other upon the head with a stunning force that sends him reeling back.

Now is the time for escape. They must not wait until the demoralized forces of their foes come together again. Both of the men understand the situation exactly. They do not turn their backs while there are any enemies to encounter, but, having cleared the field, they believe the time to make a judicious retreat has come.

Even Napoleon made retreats, some of them, like that from Russia, very disastrous ones. So other brave generals have met with occasions when it was expedient to retire, and a skillfully conducted retreat, General McClellan used to say, is as worthy of praise as a battle won.

Bob and his companion rush toward the corner of the garden wall. Although such a short time has elapsed since leaving Campertown with the ladies, Bob has high hopes of the little fellow having accomplished something in the way of getting Nina and her maid down the rope ladder.

Nor is he mistaken.

The Specimen can be intrusted with important duties without becoming demoralized. Some men, upon having sudden emergencies appear and desperate measures thrust into their hands, run about like roosters with their heads cut off.

When Monsieur Bob leaves him, with the injunction to save the ladies while he goes to the assistance of Shackelford, Felix deliberately takes hold of the rope ladder and fastens one end of it to a limb of a tree standing by the wall. This he is enabled to do by means of the broken strands which Bob's muscles snapped.

Having accomplished this much to his satisfaction he tosses the ladder over and arranges it in the proper way. All is ready, and Campertown turns to the ladies, who stand there trembling, listening to the awful sounds of the mad battle raging not twenty yards away.

"Come, one must go down," he says, with more authority in his voice than anyone would dream he could show.

"Nanette, you go," says Nina.

"You first, dear mistress."

"No, no; not while he is there in danger! I could not leave him! Descend—it is my wish!" There is no disputing this order, and Nanette proceeds to do as she is told. A thought has come to Campertown, and he looks over the wall. It is a wise action, indeed; the moon shows him a shadowy figure creeping over from the ruined tower; some enemy who would receive the first one down the ladder.

This raises the little man's spirit at once, and without hesitation he jerks out the revolver he has provided himself with, and begins popping away. At the first shot the dark figure leaps three feet into the air, and when the second follows he dashes at full speed down the rough roadway, as though the Old Nick were after him.

"Hide this in your bosom, Nanette. Use it if the occasion arises, and fear not—your own Felix is here close by. Now descend!"

She hears and obeys; it is worth a good deal to have implicit faith in one man, even though his body is below the normal in point of size. Eagerly Campertown watches her descent, and heaves a huge sigh of relief when he finds that she has safely reached the ground. At least his anxiety in that quarter is over.

"Now, Mademoiselle," he says, touching Nina on the arm, "it is your turn."

"Wait;" she breathes, without looking at him, her bosom heaving with tremendous emotion, "the battle rages no longer; either they are victorious, or else—*mon Dieu!* What if he is slain—my brave Bob!"

"Some one comes!" cries Campertown, pointing beyond the bushes, where dark figures are seen rushing toward them; the little fellow knows not whether they be foes or not, and advances his revolver in that direction, but his arm is clutched by Nina's eager hand.

"You must not fire!" she cries; "see, it is Bob and the captain! They are alive! Heaven has been kind; they are unhurt! In another moment they will be here!"

Her "moment" is hardly three seconds, for the men come hurrying up, breathing hard, yet showing no signs of being wounded. Bob is instantly at her side.

"Why are you here, Nina, darling?" he asks. "I thought you would be safe below by this time."

"I knew you were in danger. I could not take my freedom at the expense of your life," she makes reply.

Bob's heart glows within him, but well he knows this is no time for love passages. First they must escape from this hornet's nest.

"Delay no longer, I beg. Camp, slip down ahead, will you please?"

Felix is only too willing to obey, and goes down the rope ladder with the dexterity of a squirrel. Then comes Nina's turn. She does not hesitate, but is assisted to the top of the wall and quickly vanishes below.

"Now, Aleck!"

"I am last, my dear fellow!"

There is on time to argue about these matters now; Bob flits over the wall like a will-o'-the-wisp, and descends the ropes in a manner that would have brought him praise from any sailor who could have seen him.

Nor is Shackelford backward about following. He knows Musta-el-Gaber is bringing his demoralized forces together again, for he can hear his lusty shouts; they will bear down upon this same corner in another minute, and, armed only with the *yataghan*, he would not present a very stubborn resistance to their onslaught.

Besides, he is quite anxious to be away. The pleasant future, at sea on Bob's dandy yacht, holds out an alluring prospect, and there is no reason why he should not live to make it three of a kind.

So he also clambers down the face of the wall by means of the rope ladder, holding on to his captured weapon, as he does not mean to lose all evidence of his little engagement above.

All are now united.

The race for the boat begins. Bob and Felix have their hands full assisting the ladies, while Shackelford, as usual, brings up the rear.

As before, the moon is treacherous, and betrays them to those who hunt. With utter darkness about the spot their chances of getting away would be greatly improved.

Dark forms begin to come down over the wall by means of the wonderful rope ladder; forms as supple as monkeys and as full of fury as the gorilla of Stanley's Darkest Africa.

These, of course, are Musta-el-Gaber and his men, bent still upon revenge.

Hurrying along as fast as they can, our friends head for the water. It is some little distance away, the more the pity, and all the while they must be followed by this squad of dark pursuers, now pushing close to them, anon falling back as our friends whirl around and send a warning shot, yet all the while threatening.

Monsieur Bob does not know yet whether they have won or not; the chances seem about evenly divided. If the dark pursuers have the courage to make a last desperate rush they may play the mischief with the gallant trio.

Every step takes them nearer the boat, and Bob's heart grows lighter. He even bends down and whispers in the ear of Nina:

"Saved—as by fire, darling!"

Are his words premature? With a chorus of shouts the Arabs, who have been brought up to the scratch again by the sight of the blue water dancing in the moonlight, make a sudden rush. They have let it go too long, for even as they close with the three adventurers Monsieur Bob's voice roars out:

"To the rescue, John Burrows, to the rescue!"

Two giant forms spring into view, and with hearty cheers the English sailors proceed to do the Arab contingent up. This flank movement is utterly unexpected, and the followers of Musta-el-Gaber melt away visibly.

It has hardly begun, to tell the truth, before it is all over; a few unfortunates lie on the sand where they have been struck down and the rest have gone in every direction.

"Where's the boat?" cries Bob, almost frantic with the great joy that comes over him.

"Right here, sir," returns Burrows.

They help the ladies in and immediately follow, not knowing what spirit of deviltry may come over the malignant Arab chieftain when he finds his prey has escaped him.

The sailor men pull with a will.

All Algiers is left behind. Their feet have touched African soil perhaps for the last time. They leave Mohammedism and bigoted darkness, and glide out upon the moonlit waters that seem like a silver path-way leading to paradise. Looking shoreward Monsieur Bob sees one of the figures slowly rise to his feet; he can even discern the upraised arm as the voice of the Italian, Count Morisini, full of venom, rings after them:

"You have won this time, Monsieur Bob. It is not the last meeting we shall have. Revenge may be all the sweeter for the delay. You hear my oath: Standing here, bathed in my own blood, I, Ricocco Morisini, swear to follow you to the end of the earth, and to bring upon you the most terrible revenge, that is worse than death!"

His ravings die away as they glide over the silver sea, their hearts beating high with hope and joy. The future seems as bright as the gentle waves around them, and in that time of peace after storm there is no reason why they should remember the Italian's words with uneasiness; yet in dreams they find Monsieur Bob, to bring distress to his mind as he studies the meaning of that terrible threat.

CHAPTER III.

AFLOAT ON THE BLUE SEA.

Before them they see the dandy little yacht with her sails set, all ready for the voyage. Burrows has made no mistake about heading in the proper quarter. Soon all are on board, and the voice of the captain is heard, giving orders; the anchor comes up from its hiding place in the mud, and presently away they go with a fair breeze over their starboard quarter. What music can equal the gurgle of the water as the stem of a jaunty little yacht plows the sea? It is the sweetest sound on earth to the man who loves the water.

They fear no pursuit, and even though their enemies should follow in *felucca* or *baggala*, what have they to dread? Will not the staunch little *Skip-jack* sail three feet to their two?

So all hearts are light; the moon shines as it never did before, they think, as, standing on deck in a little group, they see the headlands fading from view, and even the various vessels lying in the harbor becoming dim in that mysterious, hazy light.

Monsieur Bob dives into the cabin, and in a few minutes comes on deck again. He is not alone. Abdul Medshid and his lovely daughter accompany him.

As all speak French more or less, conversation can be carried on in that way, though both the merchant and his daughter talk English also.

Thus they pass an hour or more upon deck in a merry way. By this time they are long out of sight of land, and around them heaves the wide expanse of the silvery sea.

Bob has arranged matters so that Nina and her maid have one of the cabins, or staterooms, as they really are. Zella occupies a second, while Abdul Medshid takes the last. The Honorable Felix has his choice of bunking with the merchant, but prefers sleeping on a divan in the cabin.

As for Captain Shackelford, he is a soldier, and used to accepting whatever the fates send him. He goes with Bob, no matter what comes upon that worthy. A sailor's hammock is good enough for a man of his size, nor will it be the first time he has slept in such an affair. A man who has roughed it all through Mexico and South America, not to speak of occupying a bungalow in India for nearly a year, must have spent scores of nights in a hammock, because of its coolness and freedom from reptiles' visits.

The yacht is not the small affair one would think from hearing Bob's talk. Shackelford is amazed at the stowage room aboard. They have an awning raised on deck, under which the three hammocks are slung which our trio of adventurous friends mean to occupy.

Monsieur Bob is a busy man, since he has to see about all these things himself. Even now he is far from done; the most desperate business of all remains.

Captain Paxton is forward looking after some business, and the three gentlemen are seated under the canopy as though to finish their cigars before retiring, but in reality to converse and arrange their plan of action.

Shackelford is astride of a camp chair, his elbows resting on the back, a favorite attitude of this high roller when at his ease. The Specimen has run out of tobacco for cigarettes, and, much against his will, has been compelled to accept of a cigar, which he handles as though it weighs a ton, and smokes very gingerly. He is disconsolate over his lack of forethought, and with horror in his voice bewails the fact that it may come to such a pass that he shall have to suck meagre consolation out of a pipe, if so be there are any aboard. It does not dawn upon him yet that with pipes there must be tobacco, which can be rolled into cigarettes; *that* joy will came later.

They talk, these three men who have already seen many adventures together, of the peril that now hangs over them. Paxton has been suave and polite, but Shackelford knows his kind, and has analyzed his peculiar glances.

"There's deep deviltry in him," he affirms; "I can read the critter like a book. He was put out at seeing the number of friends you brought aboard, but I reckon he's made up his mind what to do with us all after capturing you, Bob."

"What's that, Aleck?" queries Monsieur Bob.

"Set us adrift in one of the boats! The weather is fair, we could reach shore somewhere, and no doubt the walking is good," replies the captain in the coolest way imaginable, knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"Confusion take him! That gives me an idea!" says Bob, suddenly.

"Let's have it before you lose your grip."

"We can get rid of the rascals in the same way; I'll call it cheap to give a boat away!"

"Won't you be short handed in case we run across foul weather?"

"Not at all; I have more help now than I really need. Besides, I shall send only a few of the worst men with Paxton, and in case of actual necessity we could take their places."

The veteran wags his head.

"Just so. I'm not a sailor by trade, but I reckon I could do some good. As for Felix—"

"By Jove! I'm an old cruiser, dash my tarry wig, and don't you forget it, my hearties! I've been to Cape Town on board Lord Wentworth's yacht, pulled braces, steered, made a nuisance of myself generally. Yes, I'm a Jack Tar. Count on me in any emergency," drawls the little man, soberly.

Bob and Shackelford exchange glances, and then look out over the shining sea to avoid laughing. Really, the idea of the Specimen tugging at ropes, furling or reefing sails, and slushing around generally aboard a yacht—he, the dandy, whose shirt fronts are always immaculate, whose cuffs are ornamented with dainty buttons, and whose hands look as soft as a lady's—the idea is absurd! But then the other has already developed strange traits, such as they did not dream he possessed, and he might spring a new surprise on them at any moment.

"What do you purpose doing, Bob?" asks the veteran, glancing forward and still talking in the low tone that has marked their conversation.

The man at the wheel is not far away, but they have nothing to fear from this quarter. It is honest John Burrows who steers. He seems to pay no attention to the gentlemen, and yet he must hear nearly every word.

"Before I go to extreme measures I must make sure that what we have heard is true."

"How will you do that, Bob?" continues Aleck.

"Well, if this desperate idea is to be carried out that man must be aboard."

"Ah! yes, Achmed, the sorcerer."

"The question is, shall we find him here?"

"In the black hole below, sir," comes in a whisper from the man at the wheel.

"Sure of it, John?"

"He was aboard at sunset, sir."

"Well, I shall make sure of that first. Then we will arrange the other business."

Bob throws his cigar away and goes below. Perhaps twenty minutes elapse before he again makes his appearance. Paxton is still busily engaged up in the bow; it looks as though he does not want to come near the gentlemen.

"Well?" breathes Campertown, as the master of the dandy yacht drops upon a stool.

Monsieur Bob bends forward, and his voice is peculiarly metallic as he says:

"He's there, gentlemen, as sure as fate."

"You didn't see him, Bob?" asks Felix.

"No, but I heard him. I knew of a way to approach the black hole carefully, and lying in wait I used my ears. At first I could hear only the ripple of water along the sides of the boat. I waited. At length there was a shuffling sound, and then I distinctly heard an Arab oath. That settled the business with me; I knew Achmed was there, and growing stiff in his confinement."

"Then you can arrange your plan?"

"That is easily done now. Listen. I will take Burrows' place at the wheel while he goes forward and gives our trusty friends warning to be ready. When they hear me give a signal they are to rush on deck and secure the hostile sailors. That signal will be 'Rule Britannia.'"

"Good! And depend on us to back you up," says Shackelford.

He continues to smoke his cigar as nonchalantly as you please; such little affairs do not excite him to any great degree. Camp has tossed his weed overboard, only too glad of an excuse for disposing of it. He stealthily examines a revolver he has secured from Bob's cabin, to make certain that the mutineer captain has not been meddling with its contents.

Monsieur Bob meanwhile relieves Burrows at the wheel and sends the man forward. If the captain asks him what he is after he is to have a reasonable excuse ready.

By this time it is one o'clock in the morning.

The yacht is dancing along over the sea at a good pace, and looks like a thing of life as she leaves a foamy wake behind. Almost overhead the moon beams down upon them, showering her dreamy light on the scene, but beyond a certain distance they cannot depend with certainty on their eyesight, for fair Luna's illumination is very deceptive.

Just as Bob has foreseen, Paxton, suspicious because his conscience troubles him, stops the English sailor to put a question; but Burrows has a ready answer that sounds natural enough, and proceeds to the quarters of the men.

The little affair grows decidedly interesting, and Shackelford really believes he will enjoy it yet. Perhaps he allows his thoughts to roam in another quarter, for it is a fact that when once these old bachelors with the ironclad hearts do fall in love, they plunge headlong into the breach, and with their fervor outdo even the hotspurs of a more tender age. Zella, dressed in the costume of a French lady, has appeared before him as a most bewildering beauty; he no longer makes any attempt to struggle against his doom, but readily yields himself a captive to her charms. Like the Turk, he philosophically consoles himself with the old phrase, "Kismet! It is fate!"

Some one approaches; it is Burrows who

advances, having come from the forecastle. Bob asks him one question:

"How are matters forward, John?"

"Every man is armed and on the alert. I've drilled them, sir; they know who their enemies are, as you will see. When you shout the signal every Briton comes on deck determined to save the yacht or shed his own blood!"

Such words are cheering, and Monsieur Bob, as he relinquishes the wheel, knows he need have little fear as to the result.

Now comes the crucial test—the traitors must be secured. Whether this can be done without bloodshed remains to be seen, but Bob Crane is determined to have control of his own boat, no matter at what cost.

Without any nervous hesitation he walks forward. Shackelford arises and stretches his long form with a yawn.

"Come, Camp, we're in for it. The curtain rises on Act Two; scene laid upon the blue Mediterranean; mutineer captain at bay; lively little tussle, perhaps, and some popping of pistols, etc. Let's stroll forward, so as to be near Bob. I wouldn't miss being in this affair for a commission of general in the army of the Persian Shah!"

Any one who knows Aleck Shackelford can truthfully vouch for this. His soul flourishes in the roar of battle, and languishes in the piping times of peace. It is worth something to see a man of his nature meet a new and desperate dilemma. No matter how serious the problem, he goes out to face it with all the eagerness that marks the prancing of a war-horse when the smoke and roar of battle drift that way. A strange man is Captain Aleck, and yet by nature he is not cruel. Something in his composition makes him love excitement; he is a born soldier, that is all.

As Monsieur Bob walks quickly forward, the captain catches the sound of his footsteps on the deck. He turns his head and discovers who comes. Does something within warn him that danger hovers near? Perhaps there is that in the manner of Bob's advance to strike alarm to his heart. The guilty must ever be cowards; the lashing of conscience makes them so, and Captain Paxton has sold himself to Satan for a price.

He rises to his feet.

Two sailors are near him; Bob notices that both of them belong to the gang that the captain depends on; he would not hesitate in his movement were the whole of them gathered around Paxton.

Now he comes to a stop directly in front of the captain; so close is he that should he desire he can put out his hand and clap the other upon the shoulder.

"Captain, how far are we from land?" is the strange question he asks.

"Something like ten miles, sir; if it was morning you could make out the Algerian mountains lying over yonder," replies Paxton, pointing almost dead astern.

"There is not enough sea to swamp our largest boat, is there, Captain?" pursues Bob.

"Why—no—sir!" stammers Paxton, who turns pale in the moonlight, then flushes.

"And sailor men could make their way to the shore by morning if no storm arose, could they not?"

"It is—possible, Mr. Crane," replies the other, with quaking knees; his wretched heart no doubt stands still in an agony of fear.

"I am glad to hear it—for your sake, Paxton," says Bob, coolly.

"Sir?"

"You will have a chance to set foot on African soil again very soon. Some of your boon companions will accompany you if the boat can hold them."

"Confusion! I—"

"Keep cool, my man. Your devilish plot is known to me. Some men would hang every mother's son of you from the yard-arm, but I am disposed to be merciful; I shall just put you adrift and leave you to your fate."

"It's all a mistake, sir—"

"If you mean letting you go, perhaps it is. Don't attempt to lie out of it, man. You only dig deeper your grave."

"Do you think I'll go quietly overboard—"

"Quietly or not, I know a man of your size will go, all the same."

Paxton by this time has in a measure recovered his presence of mind. He sees that all is lost unless he can suddenly overpower the owner of the yacht and his allies. Hence he gives a sudden signal that will bring every man of his on deck, eager as tigers in the jungle to fight.

Almost immediately men come rushing on deck; where erstwhile all was quiet and almost deserted now fairly swarms with the blue-shirted seamen.

Stranger still, every other man seems to recognize his selected enemy at sight, and springs upon him instantly. Thus there are numerous wrestling matches seen, and human forms go whirling about along the deck as though indulging in a mad waltz.

Monsieur Bob has instantly followed the signal of Paxton with the cry of "Rule Britannia," and his bulldogs these are who come tumbling up from below with the others and fasten upon the mutineers so eagerly.

Nor has Bob neglected the chief conspirator; he sees Paxton in the act of drawing a revolver, and, under the impulse of the moment, lets his terrible right straight out from the shoulder. The captain goes down like an ox in the shambles, and he can thank his lucky stars if his head is not broken by the tremendous thump it receives when coming in contact with the deck.

The two sailors near by have sprung to the assistance of Paxton. A warning cry from Shackelford causes Bob to turn and meet the fellows half way. They do not like the looks of things, but necessity impels them forward. Shackelford deliberately puts a bullet through the arm of one and disposes of him, while Bob dodges the vindictive blow the other aims at his head with a marlin spike, and proceeds to lay him out where he can do no harm.

As for the Specimen, he runs around, and wherever he sees a dark face, knocks the man on the head with his revolver. Thus, in a very few minutes the English half of the crew has gained possession of the yacht. No lives have been lost, although some of the mutineers have been roughly handled.

It is just at this moment that a dark form appears on deck. The battle is over, and there is no trouble in telling which side won.

"Good Heavens! Look out for the Arab, Bob!" cries Shackelford, as this dark figure springs past him and rushes toward the spot in the bow where Monsieur Bob is bending over the senseless form of his recreant captain.

The man from Chicago hears the warning, and, guessing its import, instantly springs to his feet and wheels, to find himself face to face with the dark-faced demon who has planned to have him cast into the crater of Vesuvius.

Achmed has a knife in his hand; perhaps the tip of it is poisoned so that even a scratch may bring death; Bob has heard of such things down in Egypt, and does not like the idea of thus dying like a dog.

He has nothing in his hands to ward off an attack, and it looks as though they must come to close quarters. Although Bob's superior strength leaves no doubt as to the final result, he does not fancy that knife, shaped something like a Malay creese, caressing his ribs.

Achmed only pauses because the moonlight dazzles his eyes, coming as he does out of the hole where the darkness can be almost felt. He knows the man he hates is before him, and simply gathers strength for the rush as he crouches there a few seconds, looking like a wild animal at bay.

Monsieur Bob has not forgotten the tricks picked up during gymnasium practice, and it is not in accordance with his usual custom to remain idle while an active foe threatens his life.

As the murderous Arab launches his body forward with the full intention of falling upon Bob, and slashing him with the knife he waves above his head, he meets a sudden obstacle, upon which he has evidently failed to count.

This is the foot of the Chicago giant.

It has been suddenly extended, and takes Achmed exactly in the pit of the stomach. Shackelford, who has broken the spell which has apparently bound him, and advanced a few paces toward the scene of action, hears a peculiar thud, instantly followed by a shriek, and sees the Arab flying backward as though shot from a catapult, such is the tremendous impetus given by the muscular contraction of Monsieur Bob's right leg; he has not engaged in rough-and-tumble fights on the field of glory during his collegiate foot-ball days for nothing.

The knife and man part company, the former going overboard, while Achmed falls upon the deck, where he is instantly pounced upon by a little game-cock in the shape of the Honorable Felix, who endeavors to clutch the fellow's throat with one hand, while the other, still grasping the revolver, makes desperate blows at Achmed's cranium.

It seems, however, that the Arab is not yet subdued; he rises to his feet with Felix actually hanging on to his throat. One fierce toss he gives the little man, whose hold is broken and himself sent sprawling to the deck. The forward hatch being open, Felix gently slides out of sight.

Several men, Shackelford among them, attempt to corner the dark rascal, but Achmed, possibly believing death at the yard-arm awaits him if captured, springs to the side of the yacht, raises one hand aloft as though invoking the curse of Mohammed upon the little ship and all those on board, and then plunges over.

All distinctly hear the splash; they strain their eyes to see where the wretched man comes to the surface, but no one catches a glimpse of his head; the yacht speeds on and Achmed is left to his fate, twelve miles from shore; there is no hope of his ever reaching land.

Those on board have no occasion to remember the sorcerer with any regret. They turn their attention to living issues.

Monsieur Bob calls all the men before him and addresses them. Few words are needed, as the honest British tars have already a pretty good idea as to the truth. They cheer him to the echo when he announces that henceforth John

Burrows is to be known as the captain of the yacht, and heartily agree that the rascally mutineers get off lightly in being put adrift.

Then the largest boat is made ready, water, provisions, oars and a small sail stowed away, after which Paxton and six of his leading spirits are compelled to enter the boat.

There are several others who claim to have been forced into the conspiracy, and as Bob reads faces he makes out that these fellows are weak-kneed but not vicious men. Hence they are pardoned and allowed to remain, with the full understanding that a second offence means death.

Monsieur Bob himself bends down to cut the rope that drags the boat astern. No one speaks; it is too solemn an occasion for jokes of any sort. The men, seven in all, crouch in the bottom of the cedar craft; the dangers before them have even paralyzed their tongues, and, though they scowl at the man whom they would have doomed to a terrible death, no one dares revile him. A fear of his indomitable strength and courage has come upon them all; they cower in his sight.

The knife falls upon the rope; instantly the boat with its seven occupants drops astern. They can see it for some little time in the moonlight, rising and falling upon the waves; and even notice that those aboard have recovered their senses, so that they are erecting the small sail, which may help them head for the Balearic isles, some hundreds of miles north, or by skillful management enable them to work back to the Algerian coast.

At the moment Monsieur Bob cuts the painter of the boat and sends the little bark adrift on the great Mediterranean, a dark face, with wet, black hair clinging to it, looks out from a bull's-eye window midway toward the stern, and a pair of devilish Arab eyes catch a last glimpse of Paxton and his fellow voyagers as they drift astern. Then the face disappears.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BAY OF NAPLES.

Days have passed since the yacht quitted the harbor of Algiers—days that to those on board the little craft have seemed almost like a dream, followed by nights that can be likened only to those of which the poet sings. Sometimes the moon has hung above the sea, gilding their way to the east, like a strange lantern suspended in the heavens. Then, again, the stars are their only guide, beaming with liquid tenderness upon the dimpling wavelets.

On one night heavy clouds hide all the heavenly luminaries, and a storm bowls down upon them from the north—a storm that howls and shrieks with demoniac fury for hours, and seeks with its demon fingers to tear the dandy yacht to pieces; but there are brave hearts on board, and men who know how to baffle the terrible designs of the storm-king manipulate the vessel so that, although she tosses about on the raging waters like a cork, she weathers the gale without loss of rigging.

It puts them about a day's sail out of the way, but as beautiful weather again comes upon the sea, none o them regard this as a serious misfortune.

Thus they speed on their way, and finally one afternoon draw near Naples, the city which is their destination. It is something more than a coincidence that brings them to this place, the very city which Paxton had intended running for in case he was successful in capturing Monsieur Bob and handing him over to the tender mercies of the revengeful Achmed.

One of the first objects they see, drawing near the coast, is the smoke that creeps up from the crater of the terrible Vesuvius. Then gradually objects upon land began to grow distinct as the fine westerly breeze wafts them on at a spanking pace, the little yacht doing her prettiest.

All are on deck, enjoying the magnificent air and the picturesque view. The bay of Naples has always been famous for its beautiful scenery. It is in the form of a semi-circle, and the blue waters shelter boats and vessels of all nations, such as can only be seen in an Italian or oriental port. Take London or New York, and the eye meets ugly lighters, with dirty, patched sails, clumsy tugs, and boats used more for service than looks. In foreign countries, such as Algiers, Constantinople and Naples, besides the vessels of the world can be seen scores and hundreds of native boats that, by their odd shape and picturesque appearance, add much to the beauty of the scene.

The hills rise steeply behind, in terraces, and upon these the city is built. Above can be seen the frowning castle of St. Elmo, and, further on, the famous church of San Martino is outlined against the evening sky. On one side the rocks seem to project out into the sea, and here another grim fortification looms up—Castle Nuovo.

With a setting sun falling upon this scene, it is really like one of enchantment. Never can any of those on board ever forget what their eyes now behold.

Captain Burrows has fortunately been here before, when sailing under Campertown, and hence knows where to anchor. It is a lucky thing to reach port at just this hour, for it leaves only time to get nicely settled before the darkness rushes down upon them.

As the darkness comes they can discover something of a strange light hovering over the ugly crown of Vesuvius, and Monsieur Bob's thoughts must naturally take him back to the awful plan of that demon, Achmed, to toss him into the boiling lava deep down in the yawning crater of the volcano. If so, he dismisses the thought with a shrug of the shoulders, for he is in very pleasant company just at present, and as happy as a king.

During the voyage of some seven hundred miles, consuming many days, it may be set down for a fact that the people on board Monsieur Bob's yacht have become better acquainted with each other than would have resulted from a year's intercourse on shore.

Long since the whole business seems to have been cut and dried so far as the three couples are concerned. The soldier of fortune, accustomed to dashing onslaughts and desperate enterprises, does not let grass grow beneath his feet. He has already had an understanding with Abdul Medshid, who admires him greatly, and undoubtedly the bold soldier must have won Zella's consent, for their actions declare them to be lovers.

No wonder the days have passed by on swift wings, when the little god of love crowns the yacht with his smiles.

They seven sit down to their meals in the lovely cabin together, for Nanette is a maid no longer, but a companion to Nina, a place her accomplishments and family permit her to fill with honor.

The evenings have been spent in music, and again and again the voice of song has gone out over the waters while their brave little craft fairly flies over the blue sea. And now they have completed their long voyage at last, and the yacht lies anchored in the lovely bay of Naples, with the many lights of the wonder city gleaming on one hand, while on the other they can see the strange, awful glare that lights the fleeting clouds above the crown of old Vesuvius.

A steamer passes in just after they are anchored, and the captain remarks to Monsieur Bob, near whom he chances to stand:

"The steamer from Algiers, touching at Stora, Tunis and Palermo."

Monsieur Bob expresses surprise.

"They must have started after we did, as they could make much better time," he remarks.

The captain states it as his belief that this was the next steamer out after their departure.

"She may carry news of our little adventure. We must scan the papers to-morrow," Bob says.

Then, as a sudden thought strikes him, he earnestly looks along the side of the little steamer, as though searching for some one. A number of persons can be seen leaning over the rail, but owing to the gathering darkness he fails to distinguish a single face.

Then his thought, whatever it may be, dies away, for a soft hand plucks his sleeve, and Nina's voice breathes words in his ear—Nina, who has given her promise to become his wife when they reach this lovely city on the sea.

He is very happy, this Monsieur Bob, and it is no wonder he does not see the shadows that already begin to fall athwart his path, for all around him seems happiness; he has health and wealth, and now the sweetest girl in all Europe has given him her love. What more could he ask of the gods?

Six bells and the call to supper. They surround the table in the cabin, and the cook outdoes himself in the effort to please, for Bob has privately doubled his pay if he will do himself proud.

When the meal is done they again seek the deck. Shackelford has business that takes him ashore, and the boat is to wait for him. Bob has offered his company, but the soldier will not listen to such a thing, knowing how well satisfied his friend must be to remain on board the yacht when it carries such precious freight as Ma'm'selle Nina.

Somehow the veteran's absence breaks up the usual jollity of the party. They do not sing on this night, but, sitting under the awning, talk of the past events.

As is natural, they fall to discussing their absent fellow voyager, and Bob tells many a yarn in which the brave soldier figures as a hero. He has seen Aleck Shackelford engaged in more than one deed where his virtues shine forth. The story of his defense of the poor girl in Alexandria, who was beset by drunken *dragomans*, is told again, along with others which have happened under the personal observation of Bob—at Cairo in Egypt, on board a Nile *dahabieh* when the crew of rowers mutinied and attempted to assassinate their passengers; in Constantinople, and even away up at St. Petersburg, where the friends unfortunately became mixed up with a band of Nihilists and were trapped by the secret police of the Third Section, only escaping transportation to the salt mines of Siberia on account of a ring Shackelford wore, which he sent to the czar, it being returned with their full pardon.

These strange things Bob tells with pleasure; it is a privilege for him to praise the man he loves as an elder brother, and who has stood at his shoulder when the iron hail of battle and death showered around. Bob is a natural story teller, and he exerts himself on this occasion to the utmost.

His five hearers sit spell-bound, and time passes unheeded. Monsieur Bob is unable to explain where the soldier received the czar's ring, but fancies it must have been for brave service on the field of Plevna, where Shackelford distinguished himself by leading a forlorn hope, and carrying the Turkish position with the troops placed under his orders.

Eight bells have struck, the dog watch is over, and at nine o'clock two bells sound again from an Italian man-of-war which is anchored to port.

The conversation has become more general, and finally Zella, who seems to have lost interest in it when the subject no longer deals with the man she loves, bids the others good night and retires to her state-room.

Soon Abdul follows suit.

The two remaining couples promenade the deck for a short time longer, and in low tones talk over their plans for the future, which looks very bright as seen through love's glasses.

Finally the ladies declare they must also retire, and are reluctantly allowed to depart by the gentlemen.

Left to themselves, Monsieur Bob and the Specimen conclude to have a last smoke before turning in. Campertown has been made happy by the discovery of seemingly unlimited quantities of excellent smoking tobacco which has been stowed away in various nooks by the master of the craft, and the little man has had nothing to complain of during the long voyage just ended in the harbor of Naples.

So, lighting up, they puff away for a while and chat; many interesting subjects present themselves for discussion.

Then Felix finishes his third cigarette, walking up and down the deck in his nervous fashion, and announces his intention of seeking his divan in the cabin.

Monsieur Bob is alone now.

The sailor has strung up the hammocks under the awning, which Shackelford and himself have used with comfort since leaving Algiers, with but one night's exception, when the storm raged, and on that occasion not a soul on board the dandy yacht had five minutes' sleep, such was the awful roar of the elements and the tremendous heaving of the vessel.

Moving to the rail, Bob leans over. He occasionally puffs at his weed, but it is in a mechanical way, for his thoughts are far off.

The night is warm and pleasant—a dreamy one, when the soul seems to float on drifting clouds. Bob sees the many lights of the city on the terraces, while standing grimly against the star-studded sky loom up the fortress of St. Elmo and the church of San Martino—opposing elements of war and peace.

There are also many lights along the bay, where vessels lie at snug anchorage. The shore is not far away, and now and then he can hear laughter and voices. Once the sweet notes of a guitar cross the waters, and then comes the song of "dark Italia's daughter." How delightful music seems when stealing over a stretch of water! It is more than romantic or sentimental—it stirs the very soul to its depths, and arouses long buried remembrances. Monsieur Bob listens like one in a dream. He feels as though he could stand there forever, listening to that sweet serenade. It will come back to him from time to time in the future, under favoring circumstances, for though he has not seen the singer, he can never forget the song.

His cigar is burnt out, and he drops it over the rail into the water. As he turns his head to take a last sweeping glance around the strange scene, he fancies that the light above Vesuvius has grown more vivid—or is it an actual fact? The volcano has been acting very queerly of late, and it is feared that an eruption may take place ere long.

He gazes at the dark mass outlined there against the sky with queer feelings. So that was to have been his tomb could the plans of the vengeful Achmed have been carried out!

It is a rather strange thing for a man to be looking at the place where others have planned his body shall lie. Really, no one could have a more imposing monument than this same grim old Vesuvius, Bob reflects with something of satire.

It can be readily understood, however, that he is not at all in love with such a fate; it pleases him better to be wedded to a delightful young woman, rather than the terrible crater of a volcano.

Thus Monsieur Bob muses, with a smile, as he watches the glow upon the fleeting clouds rise and fall with each passing minute. The yacht rides easily at anchor, and the tiny wavelets slap against her bow and gurgle along her sides. What music this is to the ear of the yachtsman who loves his craft!

Bob is unconscious of the lapse of time. He is waiting to hear the voice of Shackelford call out "yacht ahoy." More than once he fancies he catches the measured dip of oars, but the sound dies away.

Something must detain Aleck. Although Bob has not been in Naples much, he knows a good deal about it—from the San Carlo theater, where he has seen a bad-mannered audience almost mob a poor opera singer, to the great promenade known as the Palazzo Nazionale, where wonderful sights are to be seen after night has come on.

He knows Shackelford has to pass through a number of narrow streets swarming with *lazaroni*, whose daily vocation is that of beggars demanding *backshish*, and at night they ply their trade of thieves.

Bob regrets now that he did not insist upon accompanying his friend, and hopes Aleck took his advice to have one of the sailors along. Why does he not come? He raises his head. Was that a shuffling noise near him? The light of the lanterns hanging near by gives him a fair view of the deck, and as he turns his head he sees nothing save the first watch gathered in a knot forward, and doubtless spinning tremendous yarns. Still Monsieur Bob is almost ready to swear he *felt* the presence of some one near him.

Really, he must be getting nervous. So much for the sleepless nights that have followed his love making. Is he growing thin and weak in proportion, he grimly asks himself, as he shuts his right hand and delivers a tremendous blow at an imaginary enemy. That does not look like it, surely; such an argument would knock down an ox.

Then he falls to speculating again as to the future, which seems rosy-hued. So far as the human eye can see there does not appear to be a cloud upon the horizon, and certainly no one can find cause for alarm.

His love is dreaming now; does she see him in her sleep? How delicious the thought that he occupies her mind at all times, to the exclusion of all else! Lovers are ever selfish and exacting the world over.

Again Bob hears the same low sound that caught his ears before. Ah! it must be the gurgling of the water along the side of the vessel, or perhaps a laugh from one of the men.

Hark! That is surely the dip of oars; the boat comes at last, and Shackelford will soon be with them, and probably his mission a success.

Somehow while he thus leans there upon the rail, Monsieur Bob feels as though a spell is cast over him; his limbs have lost their power of motion, and even his brain ceases to think. Is this the mastery of sleep creeping over him or the lethargy of an evil spell? He feels as must the doomed bird when fluttering before the serpent's jaws, inhaling the overpowering odor it emits.

It requires a herculean effort to break this strange spell, and Monsieur Bob does so only because mind is still master of matter. At the same second he gives this tremendous move there rings out upon the still night air the startled shriek of a woman. Close to his ear it sounds, and Monsieur Bob whirls around to look upon a sight he will surely never forget to his dying day.

There, not five feet away from where he is standing, he discovers the woman he loves—Nina—with her arms locked about another man. In this individual Bob instantly recognizes the dark, vindictive features of Achmed. What evil fate has brought him here? But this is no time for questions, but action.

The attitude of the struggling Arab indicates what he has been about when so suddenly seized by Nina's arms. In one hand he holds a sailor's sheath knife, stolen from one of the sleeping men, no doubt, and this he has been about to plunge into the back of the Chicagoan as he stands there dreaming.

Thank God for the presence of Nina on the scene, and for the strength the desperate nature of the situation gives to her arms! She cannot hold the struggling Arab long, but even these few seconds are enough. Once Bob has turned and taken in this astonishing scene he is master of the situation.

How he leaps forward! The Arab tries to thrust his knife outward, but Nina has hold of that arm, and she hangs on with the desperate energy of a woman who loves and sees her darling in peril.

This gives Bob a chance to fasten one hand upon the wrist of the Arab; he gives it a snap and twist that seems to make the bones break, for Achmed shrieks with pain.

"Let him go, Nina!" cries Bob fiercely, for he desires to toss the carrion over, and pollute the waters of Naples bay with his body.

She hears, and, understanding, falls back, to watch with open eyes the work of this man who belongs to her. Monsieur Bob is fully aroused; he is like a tiger hunted in the jungle and brought to bay.

It is his notion just then that Achmed must have come from the sea, which has refused to harbor him, and back again he must go.

With his other hand he now clutches the wretched Arab by his girdle. Few men could raise another as he is doing, and yet to this young athlete the thing is only what he has practiced scores of times in the gymnasium.

A second or two he holds his dark-skinned enemy thus poised above his head, as if to gather strength for what is to follow. Then those suberb muscles of arms, back, hips and nether limbs come into play; the Arab conjurer shoots out over the rail of the little yacht like a great projectile sent from a dynamite gun.

By the favor of the light thrown from the lanterns on board, they have one glimpse of tossing arms and legs as the fellow shoots through space; then comes a tremendous splash and all is over.

The watch below come tumbling on deck, having been aroused by the cry of Nina, who is now sheltered like a trembling bird in Bob's arms.

He orders the tars to man the sides so that the dusky devil shall have no chance to crawl aboard again.

At this moment comes a hail in a cheery voice:

"Yacht ahoy!"

It is Shackelford returned, and Bob is truly glad to see him. As he clambers over the side of the vessel Aleck says:

"What the deuce was that fell overboard?"

"A man," replies Bob, with a laugh.

"Confusion! You were at the bottom of it, I'll wager, old chap. What's up—another mutiny?"

"Did you see anything of the fellow, Aleck?"

"I think I saw a head on the water, making for the landing, but just as I ordered the boat turned that way, it vanished."

"He's a cuuning rascal, I tell you."

"Meaning whom?"

"Achmed!"

"Jeruselum! Has he been on board? Tell me the whole story, old man."

This is soon done, and they turn to Nina for an explanation of her presence. This she gives readily enough, though unable to offer any solution regarding the strange feeling she had that Bob was in trouble and calling her. So intensely strong did this become that she had gotten out of her bunk, dressed, and made her way to the deck, reaching it just in time to see that terrible figure rise up behind Bob, and to throw her arms around the Arab before he could make use of his terrible knife.

"It looks as though the sweet cherubs aloft that every Jack Tar believes in, have decided to watch over us, my darling," says Bob, as he presses her to his side.

"God is good," she murmurs, from her nestling place near his heart.

When Nina is influenced to retire again, Bob and Shackelford institute a court of inquiry concerning the presence of the Arab. Many a thing comes up which at the time of occurrence has seemed of little moment to the men, but now, in the light of this recent event, assumes a new phase.

Putting these things together, they finally conclude that Achmed has been on board the yacht all the time; when he went overboard before he had caught some hanging rope at the stern and drawn himself up, hiding since then in the black hole, and stealing out in the dead of night to purloin food from the galley, for the cook had several times missed things, which had walked off in a mysterious manner.

Once in the bay of Naples the man had decided to leave the yacht, but seeing a chance to effect his vengeance, could not withstand the temptation, with the result we have noted.

It is a sweet thought to Bob Crane, that he owes his life to the girl he loves, and the circumstance draws their hearts closer together.

CHAPTER V.

HAMMOCK TALK.

The exciting incident of the night has almost entirely chased all sleep from the eyes of Monsieur Bob, and he readily joins Shackelford in a cigar.

Lying in their hammocks, swung close together, they can converse without speaking in tones that may be overheard. Bob is eager to learn about the mission which took his friend ashore, since he believes he has an interest in the matter, but he refrains from saying anything about it, and is soon rewarded by a free confession on the part of the man who has been on Italian soil.

"It's all fixed, Bob. Had a great chase to find the good dominie, though. You see he used to put up at the Grande Bretagne, but at the hotel they told me he was living with our consul, Mr. Groesbeck, back of the church Santa Chiara. I arranged it all; they meet us at nine in the morning. We take carriages to the base of the old volcano, and then, mounting, expect to arrive near the crater by three o'clock in the afternoon, where the greatest event old Vesuvius has ever seen will be consummated."

"I've no doubt they thought my notion was a ridiculous one, but—"

"Not at all. They said you could not find a more imposing place for such a ceremony. The view is grand, and the affair must certainly be classed unique."

"The ladies seem to be all agreed."

"Another good thing about it. I always did declare that if ever I married it would be under the heavens and in no church. This thing suits me exactly, and Camp, why he's so crazy to call Nanette his own that he would consent to a wedding in a coal mine or any other odd place so long as it gave her to him."

"Everything is arranged, then?"

"Nothing lacking but a fine day. By the way, Bob, I could almost swear I saw some one you know upon the street."

"Who was that?" asked Bob, carelessly.

"Musta-el-Gaber!" coolly replies Aleck, and then grins at the sudden jump the other gives.

"The deuce you say! Then he was on that steamer that came in!" ejaculates Bob.

"Very probably."

"Was he alone?"

"At the time he passed me, yes; but he met some man at the corner beyond. I could n't swear to the fact, but I have a good suspicion this party was the count."

"Morisini," murmurs Bob, thoughtfully, as he remembers the vindictive words which floated out from the Algerian shore.

"I would n't swear to it, but why not? This is his native place. I am puzzled to know how they knew of our coming, that is all, Bob."

"'Kismet! It is fate,' I tell you, old fellow. They are all here, I reckon, Achmed and his daughter, el-Gaber, Osman Digna and the count. It looks to me as though we were bound to have one more grand round with these fellows ere the battle is won."

"You do n't propose to change your plans, then?"

"Yes, instead of one revolver I shall carry two," returns Monsieur Bob, calmly, at which Aleck chuckles; it is so like his Chicago friend.

"We could have the dominie come out to the yacht with the consul and his wife; the triple ceremony might be performed here, after which we could provision and start for the Orient. I believe Constantinople is the next stopping place of the expedition."

Monsieur Bob grunts in disgust.

"I never yet ran away from danger. I'm no coward, you understand, Shackelford."

"Hardly; but, Bob, consider the ladies."

"That's just what I am doing. On the

strength of a romantic union on Mt. Vesuvius, something never yet carried out, I believe, we have gained their consent to this hurried marriage. Their hearts are set on it. If we back out now they may also take it upon themselves to change their minds."

"Bob, perhaps you're right. Who knows? Women are changeable beings—variable as the shade cast by an aspen leaf, the poet tells us."

"Here, quit running down the sex, you old converted woman-hater. Honestly, do you think yourself we should be frightened out of our romantic plans by this mere shadow?"

"No," vehemently replies the veteran.

"Then why take the side you do?"

"Because I wanted you to see the matter square in the face. We'll call it settled, then Bob?"

"Yes, and make our arrangements accordingly. If Morisini has transferred his vendetta from Algiers to Naples, we'll try to accommodate him in case of a meeting, to the best of our ability. I have no fears on that score, my good man."

"Well, I'll follow your example, and carry a couple of revolvers for good luck. Heaven help the man who dares to try and lay a hand on —*my wife!*" How tenderly does the soldier of fortune pronounce that name! He has faced the world as a bachelor for more than fifty-five years, but that has not made his heart grow old, and he loves Zella with all the strength of his years.

There is no moon now, since the old one has vanished, and the new is but a silvery horn that trembled hesitatingly a few minutes above the watery waste after darkness came, and then dropped behind the horizon. Hence the stars alone will keep watch over them as their little bark rocks upon the bay of Naples.

Shackelford scratches another match on his boot, and applies the flame to his cigar, which has had the bad taste to go out while he talks.

"That was only a part of my mission ashore, Bob," he says, complacently puffing away.

"True enough. You spoke of private business. How did you succeed?"

"Even better than I expected. I was looking for a man who carries a secret with him which I would give something to possess. There's no need of my entering into particulars, but this matter has great weight with me.

"This man, Signor Guido Lombardi, was a sort of head chamberlain at the Palazzo Reale, probably the finest building in all Naples. After getting through with my other business I walked along the strada di Toledo until finally I found myself opposite the palace, which was lighted up as though some festivity was going on. Upon making inquiry I found that the man I wanted was dead!"

"Thunder! And you call that good luck?" bursts out Monsieur Bob.

"Wait," smiles Shackelford, "you shall see. I asked when he died, and they said the morning previous. Only that day his remains had been taken to the commoner cemetery to be buried.

"Perhaps you don't know how they get rid of the poorer classes here. The Campo Santo Vecchio contains three hundred and sixty-five cells, one for every day in the year. Each morning one of these cells is opened, and all the bodies received the previous day are tumbled in promiscuously, after which the cell is hermetically sealed for a year, and on the following day another opened in rotation."

"A beastly business. I've seen the Hindoos burn their dead, and thought it the most sensible way, the ashes being cast on the Ganges," says Bob, reflectively.

"And on my part I shall always believe the Parsees in India have the most terrible way of disposing of their dead."

"How is that, Aleck?"

"Do you mean to tell me you failed to visit the Towers of Silence at Bombay when there?"

"There was trouble just then, and no foreigner was allowed to enter. I've always been curious about that place, though. Suppose you tell me what you saw there."

"Readily, my boy, seeing there's no sleep for us under the circumstances. To begin, these towers are located on an elevation overlooking the city. They are five in number, and from eighty to one hundred and twenty feet in diameter, and twenty to thirty feet high, without a roof of any sort. The interior reminded me of an ancient amphitheater. It is smoothly paved, and has three concentric rings or circles. There are passage ways between the rings to allow the passing to and fro of the corpse bearers.

"The outer one of these circles is for male bodies, the middle for female, and the inner one is entirely given over to children. Note the conformity even in death to the Parsee's idea of the general relation of the sexes, for in India, you know, as in Turkey, the women are treated as having no souls, as being an inferior sort of human clay, anyway. In the center of the tower is a deep pit, and drains, filled with charcoal, lead from this.

"The Parsees place the body in one of the rings and retire, closing and locking the iron door. Almost immediately hundreds of large vultures that have been sitting idle on the walls of the towers and the branches of neighboring trees, swoop down, and in an hour nothing remains of the body but the cleanest bones. In three days these are thrown into the central pit, where they become dust.

"The water from the pit draining through the charcoal leaves the earth pure. The surroundings of the towers are neat and clean, and I did not feel the horror I expected. Not a sound was heard in all the place save the dripping of water or the occasional croak of a vulture, but I assure you, Bob, I was glad to leave the Towers of Silence."

"Thanks for the description. I've seen odd burial rites in many parts of the world, but never anything like that. Now go on with your yarn, old fellow. If you found your man dead, how is it you speak of success? The dead can't tell secrets."

At this Shackelford chuckles.

"Sometimes that is a deuced lucky thing, Monsieur Bob, if you know it," he says.

"Confusion! I begin to see light. Excuse me for being so obtuse," murmurs Bob.

"This Signor Lombardi held a secret which affected my family—the old story of a wild younger brother. Of course I don't mean to go into details, but it was important that I should buy a paper this man held in order to save the reputation of poor Jack, now dead.

"When I learned that the signor was dead and his body placed in the sepulchre that morning, I hoped the secret was safe forever.

"Then I remembered it was a secret in writing, and that did not die with the dead; so I set to work trying to find that document.

"I pretended that the dead man was an old friend of mine, and that I would be pleased to pay a liberal price for the clothes in which he had been wont to walk daily.

"This aroused the cupidity of the new major domo, and when he saw the color of my gold it would have done your heart good to have seen the way he went to look for those garments.

"I bought them on chance, and while the fellow had gone to get something to wrap them in I searched the pockets with trembling hands.

"Not a copper had been left in them, but several papers were there, which they evidently considered without value. Among them was the one I wanted. I instantly glanced over it, and, satisfied, held it over a lamp and watched it burn to ashes. Then I pocketed the other papers and carried off the bundle, to toss it into the first dark niche I found."

"I'm glad you were so successful, Aleck. When I spoke of coming to Naples I noticed that you were well pleased, although I did n't mention the fact."

"Yes, I had discovered where this man was to be found, and it seemed as though the fates favored me. Looking at it now, don't you see what has been done for me? If I had come later on that paper might have fallen into the hands of some one who would have blackmailed me with the greatest of pleasure."

"That's a fact. Now let's talk about our affairs and—tomorrow."

This is a subject that interests them both, and for some time their conversation is earnest. Then they note the fact that they are sleepy, and Bob goes the rounds to make sure that the watch is vigilant. He finds everything satisfactory, and can see no reason why he and Shackelford should not enjoy a sleep.

The light still hovers above Vesuvius, and there is something of a fascination in it to Bob. With his last glance he wonders what the outcome of the morrow will be; then, tumbling into his hammock, discovers that the captain has already yielded to the influence of the god of slumber, gradually closes his own eyes, and is asleep.

While the gentle waves lap the sides of the yacht, and a zephyr sighs through the rigging, the master sleeps on. Why not, when to-morrow's sun ushers in his wedding morn.

The watch is changed at eight bells, and those who retire pass the word on that Monsieur Bob has promised a doubloon to each member of the crew in case morning finds things all serene. They have learned considerable about past events from Burrows, and understand just what danger menaces them. Hence, each man keeps an unusually bright lookout, so that in case there is an attack of any sort, they will not be taken by surprise.

The night is full of alarms, it seems.

Just after the changing of the watch there is a sudden racket from the Italian man of war. Men shout, some shots are fired, and boats with lights in them can be seen moving about on the water of the bay.

Of course both Bob and Shackelford are out of their hammocks instantly. Captain Burrows comes up just then, as if to explain.

"'Tain't an unusual thing, sir. Men often desert from these Italian men-o'-war. I reckon they shot that chap, or else he got away; hope it is the latter, for I tell you they are slaves aboard them steel-clads."

"How about British service?" asks Bob slily.

"Well, you see, sir, men ain't treated now as they used to be. Still there are desertions at times; every one ain't suited."

They watch the lights moving about, and finally one of the boats draws near. An officer in the stern sheets hails the yacht, and in French asks whether they have seen anything of a deserting seaman in that quarter, whereupon of course Monsieur Bob makes answer that they have not, upon which the courteous officer exchanges compliments with him and returns to the man-o'-war.

Gradually all becomes quiet again, and Bob falls asleep, to dream of strange things, in which bellowing volcanos and runaway sailors are strangely intermingled.

He is not allowed to sleep out the night, however, without another interruption.

This time it comes in a vigorous punch from Shackelford. Bob, fully awake, lies still to see whether it is an accident or design, and thus receives a second dig in the ribs.

"Let up," he grunts, thinking his friend is only up to some practical joke.

There comes a low "hist," and he sees the head of the soldier between himself and the city lights, as Shackelford rises in his hammock and leans toward him. When Bob follows suit their heads almost touch.

"What's up? Are you dreaming, Aleck?" asks the master of the yacht, not yet certain that his friend is really awake.

"No; I've been awake for some time; don't know why; waked up suddenly and seemed to have no more sleep in my eyes. While I lay here thinking, a man brushed past me, sneaking along; he was wet, too, for I could feel the dampness where he touched me."

"Come, has the watch gone to sleep?"

"No, but I imagine this fellow must have crawled aboard at the time the watch was changed, and passed me in seeking other quarters."

"Achmed?"

"Doubtful, my boy. If it had been him the first we would have heard would have been his Arab curse as he drove his knife home."

"Who then, Aleck?"

"Perhaps el-Gaber, or more likely the poor devil of an Italian sailor who deserted from the man-o'-war over yonder."

"I reckon the last is true. What shall we do?"

"He was crawling toward the stern where one of the boats has been left. I noticed that the men had forgotten to swing it up."

"Jove! That's what he wants, the rascal—to get ashore. Perhaps he's afraid of sharks."

As he speaks Monsieur Bob springs from his hammock and is instantly followed by his friend, who means to stick by him. Some of the watch are met with, but none of them have seen anything of a prowler. Bob himself is half disposed to believe the captain must have dreamed it all, but having had one experience with Achmed he does not mean to allow the same thing to be repeated.

So they set to work searching the vessel from stem to stern. Fore and aft the sailors hasten, but Bob and Shackelford turn their steps toward the stern, having their idea as to what course the deserter will take.

Sure enough there is the boat, secured by the painter. Some one will get into difficulty when Captain Burrows sees this.

Just now the two men are deeply interested in an object which the boat contains. A man seems to be in the bow fingering the painter, and endeavoring to cast off, as though he lacks the knife necessary to sever the rope.

"Hello, there!" exclaimed Bob.

A low cry of dismay, a splash, and the boat no longer contains a living form, but the waves that are noticed when a sailor brings a lantern upon the scene indicate that the deserter is heading for the shore.

Having no more interest in the affair, Bob again seeks his hammock. He hopes there will be no further alarm, as he is tired of this business.

The watch exercise vigilance, but nothing occurs to stir them up, and finally the gray dawn appears over the hills where grim Castle St. Elmo stands, outlined in silhouette against the background of increasing light.

CHAPTER VI.

DESERTED AT THE CRATER.

The day opens clear and beautiful, and seems to promise well. Campertown is on deck dressed in a most astounding checked suit, before which all previous efforts pale into insignificance. Strange, how this little beast, whose mind seems to run so to loud suits, enormous canes and small hats, should have so much good sense in other things. As he gazes upon the monstrosity, Bob inwardly hopes Camp will be a changed man when he becomes a benedict, and the chances he believes are decidedly that way if he has judged the adorable Nanette aright.

Poor Felix does not know what a crisis in his affairs has arrived, and how he must also shed his inane desire for loud dress with his bachelor freedom; "but 't will be the making of Camp, dear boy," mutters Bob.

Then he forgets all about the little Briton and his fortunes, for Nina has come on deck, and Bob has eyes and ears only for her.

It would hardly be fair to tell all that he whispers in her ears, for remember, this is their wedding day. There, upon the brow of old Vesuvius, they will be united. It will be something to remember always, and girls are romantic wherever you find them. Perhaps, alone, not one of the three would consent to go through the ceremony, but the fact that they have companions in it gives them a peculiar courage.

Breakfast is soon ready.

Bob has arranged his plan as well as the circumstances will allow, and does not know that it can be bettered. As soon as they have gone ashore the yacht is to change her anchorage, and take up a position near the foot of the mountain. Here they can come in the two vehicles after descending, enter the boats and be taken to the yacht. It will also be convenient for them in the morning to go ashore, with the carriages in waiting again, and be driven along the road to Pompeii, where a day can profitably be spent, lunch being secured at the picturesque inn near the ruins of the house known as Diomede.

This plan has been arranged to suit their convenience, and the greatest benefit they will receive comes from not having to pass through the ill-smelling streets near the quay at nightfall. This is worth going to some trouble to escape.

All being ready, they embark. The gentlemen look happy, while the ladies blush almost constantly, as expectant brides are supposed to do. Fortunately they have veils, which ere long are drawn down over their faces to hide their embarrassment.

The boats take them all ashore, and each of the sturdy Jack Tars is remembered by the gentlemen. Their good wishes follow the party as they enter the carriages and set upon their singular mission.

Upon such an occasion as this it might be suspected that Monsieur Bob would lose something of his shrewd judgment. Most men are hardly in a condition to transact business on their wedding day.

Here is one, however, who feels that they are not yet entirely free from danger, and that it behooves a certain individual known as Monsieur Bob to be himself.

Hence, he keeps his eyes about him. One of the first things he notices is the man upon the box, the driver of their vehicle, and Bob, who is a very good judge of physiognomy, decides that the Jehu is a tough customer.

He waits until he has a glimpse of the other fellow, and then thinks:

"Two jail birds, or I'm not Bob Crane. Is it accident or design that sends them here?"

This thought returns several times to bother him, for he does not underestimate the abilities of his foes, and fears lest a gigantic plot may have been engineered for their destruction, in which these two fellows are factors.

Bob does not forget that they are in a strange country, and that the sympathy of the masses always goes with a fellow countryman. Perhaps Count Morisini is powerful here.

At any rate, he concludes, these two men will do to stop a couple of bullets from a Yankee revolver he knows of, for if it comes down to business, Monsieur Bob will not hesitate to shoot would-be assassins at Naples any more than he did at Algiers.

He cannot speak of his suspicions to Shackelford, because the ladies sit opposite, and whispering is not allowed. When the opportunity offers, though, he does manage to say in a low tone of voice:

"I admire your taste in drivers, Aleck."

The other shrugs his shoulders and mutters:

"I did n't select 'em. Beauties, ain't they? Bear watching, I guess, old man." Which remark goes to prove that the doughty captain has also kept his wits about him, even on this, the most astonishing day of his life.

These four occupy one carriage, with Abdul and the other pair of turtle doves in the other, They stop at the house of the American consul, and learn that the party have just gone. The chances are they will overtake them on the road, or at least find them at the *Atrio dei Cavalli* or "Vestibule of Horses," where visitors to the volcano have to leave their vehicles, and finish the ascent on foot.

Gaily they chatter along. The ladies recover their spirits and seem very happy. More than once the Specimen stands up in the front coach and waves a kerchief of startling colors to those who come behind, as an indication of his exuberant feelings. At any rate little Campertown sees nothing in the air to cloud his spirits. He declares again and again that he is the happiest man on earth, and the poor old merchant must feel very uncomfortable in the company of such spoons. He keeps his eyes out for the scenery, however.

It is to be feared its grandeur is not fully appreciated by any of the younger members of the party. When eyes full of love meet orbs that reciprocate the tender feeling—when a casual touch from a hand will send the blood rioting madly through every vein—when each softly spoken word seems like a caress—can any one be blamed for failing to note the desolate nature of the inclined plane up which the carriages take them, where instead of grass the eye rests on burnt stones, looking for all the world like the scoriæ of an iron furnace, with here and there the marking of an old lava stream?

Certainly not.

Fairer scenes would fail to draw forth more than a casual notice from those who are so wholly wrapped up in each other.

This dreary plain extends for nearly three miles; the ascent is gradual, until, at the top, the traveler finds himself some two thousand feet above the level of the sea.

From this point the view is superb. Vesuvius stands up like a black wall, some fifteen hundred feet above the top of the plain, shooting up against the blue sky like a grim monster. Back of this cone, and about as high, are the remains of Monte Somma, of which volcano Vesuvius is but the remainder and representative.

Between the burnt ground and the sea is a belt about two miles in width, partly covered with vineyards, with here and there a terrace of the same black calcined matter, unveiling some old current of lava beneath.

It is a singular spectacle—a grand, terrible sight that awakens one's fears, but does not call forth enthusiasm. The blue sea is the best part of it all, and upon its peaceful bosom the eyes find rest.

The Hermitage is reached. Here some monks entertain travelers who visit the volcano. As our friends have a small hamper of provisions, they do not stop here for a meal.

The vehicles are left, and the men shoulder what small packages there are to carry. All in the party are provided with alpine sticks, which facilitate the ascent.

The ladies have dressed as best the circumstances allow in order to climb. Perhaps it may not be long before they will wish they had been content with less romantic ideas, for the ascent is very direct and rough, but love tenderly helps them on, and wonders are done.

By going slowly, they manage to accomplish much. It is generally easier to climb up a height than to descend. Many an unwary traveler has found this out to his sorrow. Men have even climbed the Palisades of the Hudson at their most precipitous point, but who ever heard of anyone descending them?

The view grows more magnificent, and at each resting place they feel repaid for the hard labor. A grand panorama stretches out before them, of mountains, valleys and sea, with Naples nestling in her snug retreat along the shore of the romantic bay.

Shackelford has been up on Mont Blanc. He is one of the few daring souls who have made a desperate endeavor to scale the Matterhorn. He declares that his previous experiences can bear no comparison with this. At that time his greatest danger was the chance of being frozen to death; now he realizes that there is a possibility of his being roasted.

Indeed, when an hour or so has passed since leaving the vehicles, during which they have made remarkable progress that does credit to the ladies of the party, the ground under their feet has become so hot that one cannot allow the hand to rest upon it half a minute at a time, and such a state of affairs must be pretty hard upon their foot gear.

Still proceeding, they come to where smoke issues from cracks, a sulphurous smoke that causes one to choke when inhaled. A piece of paper thrust into one of these crevices takes fire very quickly, and even a stick does the same. Imagine the consternation of the ladies. They come together and resolve to give in; they have gone as far as they dare. See, in places the thin but hard crust has a sunken appearance, a significant indication of its frail tenure. If the gentlemen desire to continue to the crater, now close at hand, they can do so.

Monsieur Bob is the only one who cares to say he has looked down into the awful crater of Vesuvius, and, securing a rope, he starts off with one of the guides.

Shackelford is on the alert, and sees a look in the eyes of the man that horrifies him. He turns to Felix, who chances to be near him. The other guide is assisting the ladies to spread a picnic table on a rock that, by some chance, is cooler than the surroundings, while the minister and consul take turns using a pair of field glasses.

"Overtake them, my dear fellow. I don't trust that guide. It would be like him to wait until Bob strains the rope looking over into that hell-hole and then let him go. Give him to understand you are armed, and that his own life will pay for any treachery."

Campertown understands just what is expected of him. He scampers off. Although his short legs make good time he arrives on the scene to find Bob, with the rope around his waist, creeping forward to the verge of the crater, while the guide holds the rope and allows it to gradually slip through his hands.

Even the Specimen is struck with the devilish grin upon the Italian's dark face, as he keeps his black eyes glued on the form of the man from Chicago, creeping nearer and nearer that death-hole which has swallowed up many a life. That very look seems to be saying, "five hundred lire"—the price of Monsieur Bob's accidental drop into the awful depths where the molten lava, covered with ashes, boils and bubbles, sending up the terrible odors that make the brain reel.

Campertown has drawn a revolver, and his appearance is quite dramatic as he taps the chuckling guide on the shoulder.

"What seems so funny, dear boy? See this little toy? Really, I shall be compelled to blow the crown of your beastly head off if anything happens to my friend. You savvy?"

Whether the guide understands his words or not, there can be no mistaking his actions, and while the fellow looks troubled at first he soon scowls and clutches the rope firmly. There is no longer danger from this source, Monsieur Bob, so take your own good time.

Bob has no intention of trusting wholly to the rope. He takes hold of a rock with one hand, tests its stability, then looks back and, seeing Campertown's attitude, waves his hand in greeting, after which he bends over to gaze down into that devil's hole, where the imps seem to be brewing day and night, year in and year out.

A short survey is quite enough to suit his fancy, and during this period the Specimen stands with his revolver in sight, ready to carry out his threat. When his own life will pay the penalty should the American meet with an accident and fall into the crater it is absolutely certain that the guide strains at the rope, and even braces his foot against a rock in order to prevent such a catastrophe.

Then Monsieur Bob comes back and insists on Campertown assuming his place.

"Never have the chance again, and something to speak of. Get a piece of the rock from inside the crater; the wind blows the sulphur smoke the other way most of the time. It will commemorate this great day when Nanette becomes Madame Felix."

Bob's arguments are as usual overpowering, and this sly allusion to Nanette completes the business. Felix determines to go forward now and do the honors for the Campertown family.

"Watch our man, Bob. I wouldn't want Nanette to be a widow before she's been a wife," he says, in a significant tone.

"I'll do better—hold the rope myself," declares the athlete, as he takes it from the hands of the guide, whom he orders below.

The man goes with a sullen, dejected air.

"By Jove! Reminds me of a fellow who sees another chap pick up a fat purse just in front of him," is the unique remark Campertown makes.

Then he walks away with the rope secured around his waist. He is not built on the same plan as Bob, and one look is about enough for Camp, who grabs up a fragment of black rock that almost blisters his fingers, and beats a hasty retreat, rubbing his eyes as he comes as though blinded by the smoke.

What a sight this old volcano must be during one of its violent eruptions! On a certain occasion, the guides will tell you, streams of lava have shot up into the air nearly ten thousand feet, and again, millions of red hot stones have belched out until the whole mountain seemed to be of a white heat.

These vouched for eruptions must pass as insignificant, however, beside the awful one that destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum in the year 79 A. D., burying them under nearly a hundred feet of mud and ashes.

To-day the former city has been dug out and so fully restored to what it was that we are amazed, and find it easy to understand the Roman life of eighteen centuries back, the progress of their art and science, the nature of their amusements and home life. Why, one almost expects to meet a Roman senator in his toga upon the deserted streets, or hear the screams of battle between doomed Christians and wild beasts in the arena.

Monsieur Bob and his little friend have seen enough of the crater. Its yawning orifice is a shuddering sight, horrible enough to haunt them for many a day, and they gingerly pick their way over the smoking cracks to where the others can be heard laughing.

The party seem merry enough, and it is evident that they do not see the shadow that hangs over their heads.

A rude table has been spread, and what luncheon they carry is placed upon it. Fortunately they are not thrown upon the mercy of the Naples hotels, although there are few better in all Italy. The lunch, such as it is, has been prepared on board the yacht, and they know every article that enters into its composition.

All is now ready.

The American consul is a bright, witty gentleman, and he makes a speech in which he alludes to the peculiarly happy event that is about to take place.

He is heartily cheered, for the little party seems to be very socially inclined now. Then the dominie takes a hand, makes a neat little address in which he admits that this affair is by all odds the most singular that has ever come under his observation, and finally invites the three couple to stand up before him.

Then begins a most impressive scene, in which our individual characters have a most peculiar interest. The minister of the gospel has chosen a beautiful service, bringing in a part of the responses of the English church, and by degrees the ceremony is wrought out which unites those who love.

It may be readily understood that the three grooms have eyes and ears for nothing else. A man while being married cannot pay attention to outside matters. Every benedict will bear me out in that statement. If he gets through his own share of the business without blunders he deserves credit. This all of them succeed in doing, and finally the last words are spoken. Each happy husband bends over and kisses his blushing bride. And the ceremony is ended.

Then begins a series of handshakings among the men, and kissing among the ladies. All are in the happiest state of their lives, when they realize that at last the deed is done that unites them. Nothing but death can separate them now; and who wants to think of death at such a gala time as this?

The ascent of the volcano has made them have a sharp appetite. Breakfast was eaten early, and some hours have passed since noon. Even the fact that they have passed through the climax of their lives does not entirely make Monsieur Bob and the brave captain forget that they are still human.

They seize upon tin platters and beat a tatoo that calls the good people around the novel picnic table. Ten in all, they count and as merry a party as ever scaled the heights of rugged old Vesuvius. Jest and repartee follow each other in rapid succession, as they proceed to discuss the lunch provided by the cook on board the yacht, who, understanding the circumstances, has tried to excel himself.

Thus time passes. Precious time! It is unnoticed by these happy people. Heaven has been so kind to them that even the veteran soldier of fortune seems to forget there is such a thing in the world as human passion, and to Monsieur Bob everything looks rosy-hued.

Still, it is this latter individual who, while the festivities are going on, casts a sudden look of apprehension around. What has caused this feeling on his part? A change in the wind brings a little cloud of smoke around them, and sets a number to coughing, but it has the effect of arousing Monsieur Bob.

He awakens from the dream which has held him spell bound. He throws off the incubus from his shoulders. Plainly speaking, he becomes himself, and *thinks*.

Then he notices something—many things in fact, to which all of them have been blind in their enjoyment of the feast where each has striven to do his share toward making the whole a success—where wit has sparkled almost as famously as the champagne.

Monsieur Bob first takes note of the fact that, with the change of the winds, colud have rolled up. They come from the east, and there is an ugly significance in the raw feeling of the wind that probably foretells a storm.

This is only a beginning.

The next action on the part of the American benedict is to quietly draw out his watch. No one observes him. Each person seems concerned with something or other, and the ladies are wiping away the tears which have been started by that sulphurous breath from the crater.

Good Heavens! It lacks but a few minutes of four! What folly to let time pass unheeded, simply because he has been getting married. Bob cannot forgive himself.

He has sense enough not to jump up and alarm the others, but when he looks around for the guides, intending to set them to work getting ready for the descent, he receives a new shock.

The time is past now for hiding the truth. Monsieur Bob leans over and taps Shackelford's arm. As the other looks up he crooks his finger, and Aleck follows him aside.

"Do you know it is nearly four?" he asks.

"The deuce you say!"

"And the heavens clouding over?"

Shackelford thinks of his wife and grows nervous.

"Dolt that I am! Can't even get married without losing my mind. Come, we must hurry the guides. By the way, when did you see them last?"

"Just before the ceremony. My God, man! do you mean to tell me they are gone?"

"Without a doubt, Aleck. We must face the music. We have been deserted at the crater of Vesuvius, with night coming on, and a storm in prospect; deserted, with death staring us all in the face. Have you forgotten that mad Italian shrieking out from the Algerian shore? This is Count Morisini's revenge."

CHAPTER VII.

MONSIEUR BOB ACCEPTS A CHALLENGE.

These two men, who have gone through so many dangers together with such wonderful *sang froid*, stand there and look into each other's face. They experience a new feeling that has hitherto been foreign to their natures—the cold clutch of fear at their hearts! It is no longer the reckless bachelor who faces a difficulty, but the man who has had a new element, an additional care placed upon his shoulders—the responsibility of married life.

"Aleck, this is a desperate thing. Without guides how are we to get down from here?" says Bob.

"Heaven alone knows," responds the captain.

"I neglected to notice much of the way, because—well, I was taken up with Nina."

"I am in the same boat. For once in my life I have been caught napping," admits Aleck. "One thing is certain—we can't stay here."

"That's true."

"We must make a determined effort to get down. Every minute is precious," with a glance toward the cloudy sky, and then in the direction of the crater, which seems to be vomiting out a greater quantity of smoke than was the case an hour or so before.

"Why do you look that way?" asks Monsieur Bob, quick to take the alarm.

"To tell the truth, I was thinking what if old Vesuvius should take a notion to spout to-night."

"God help us then! What put that idea into your foolish old head, man?" hoarsely, from Bob.

"I heard our guides muttering something about it as we came up. Then, you know, I have experienced something of earthquake shocks, and have seen an eruption of a volcano in my time. There's a peculiar feeling in the air, that I begin to notice, that makes me think this is what they call earthquake weather."

Monsieur Bob begins to appear in his true colors again; these dreadful possibilities, instead of conquering him, make all that is manly rise to the surface.

"The situation is desperate, but there is no need of the others knowing it," he says.

"Not yet, at least," replies Shackelford.

"We can tell them that there is need of haste, as a storm may come upon us."

"And our guides have deserted us."

"They'll quickly discover that."

"One thing, comrade; don't forget that eyes will be upon us that will read any anxiety on our faces. Appear careless, if you can."

"Certainly; come, we must to work. Who knows but the loss of even a minute may send us to a horrible doom."

"A last word: I believe we shall come face to face with these enemies before we are done. Revenge would be a poor apology to an Italian unless he could see the agony he has brought."

"You may be right."

"Therefore, trust in providence and keep your powder dry."

That old maxim of the Puritans has never been improved upon. They return to the others, and it is Bob who announces the flight of the guides as nonchalantly as possible, and declares that they had better be moving.

In spite of his assumed cheery manner the others seem to guess something of the truth. A wet blanket placed over a fire would illustrate the manner in which their gaiety is brought to an end. Perhaps the peculiar, heavy feeling in the air, of which Shackelford has already made mention, begins to make itself felt by the rest of the party.

Under Bob's directions they are soon in

readiness to leave the spot, which will ever be remembered as associated with the happiest event of their lives. The consul has secured several photographs of them all, which at some future time may serve to freshen the scene in their minds, if that is necessary.

One last glance Monsieur Bob casts around. He sees the smoking crater, the moaning sea, the black plain far below. Would to Heaven they were on this latter; it might be possible then to reach shelter before the night or the storm came upon them. Regrets at such a time are useless, however natural. It is fortunate that the unhappy party have with them such men as Bob Crane and Aleck Shackelford.

At first the descent is comparatively easy, but they know it will not be like this long, remembering numerous places where in climbing up they met with trouble.

Through the cracks the smoke oozes with a denser volume than before. Then it was possible to hear the hissing, boiling noise only when the head was bent low, but to Bob's uneasiness he can easily distinguish it while standing erect. Is there any terrible significance in this thing? A wave of horror sweeps over him at the bare thought of a night spent upon the black rocks of Vesuvius, with the old volcano boiling over, and streams of lava rushing down the sides, surrounding them perhaps with a creeping death.

The crater is now out of sight, as they begin to descend the steep, precipice-like face of the upper mountain. Lucky it is each lady has an escort, for alone few women could accomplish this feat.

Since the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii in the year 79 A. D. there have been nearly fifty known eruptions of Vesuvius, some of which have been terrible. During the five centuries lying between 1100 and 1600 the volcano near Naples remained almost dead, but at this time Mt. Etna was in an active state, and served as an outlet for the subterranean fires.

In 1862 occurred an eruption causing an immense loss in life and property, and which has not yet faded from the minds of those who witnessed the sight and lived to tell it.

Recently signs have not been lacking to indicate another eruptive period to be drawing near, though, as is usually the case, those who ought to know better delude themselves with the idea that like other alarms, this may be a false one.

Both Shackelford and Crane are ready to admit that it has been the mistake of their lives to undertake this mad venture; they will never forgive themselves for planning such a thing; but at the same time that is no reason they should not strive to save themselves and those who share their danger; in fact it is an additional incentive to spur them on to accomplish deeds that ordinary men might draw back from even attempting.

Every yard of blackened rock they descend gives them new hope. The air seems to grow purer the further they draw away from that awful crater, where the elements in the earth's center war with each other, boiling and bubbling, to occasionally burst from all restraint and overleap the funnel of Vesuvius.

Monsieur Bob notes this fact and gloats over it in secret. His hopes actually begin to grow stronger, though he has never despaired, not being built that way.

It is not long before they reach a place where the route has led up a ladder that lies against a wall of smooth rock, which otherwise could not be scaled. A cry arises.

"The ladder is gone!"

The treacherous guides have, as they believed, closed the trap by removing the ladder, after descending themselves. With exclamations of dismay the tourists line the edge of the precipice and look down. Twenty feet lie between them and the base below. It might as well be eighty for all the ladies can reach it. Shackelford and Bob consult.

"I see the ladder sticking out from behind those loose rocks," declares the taller, pointing, and, although a dark fog has crept up suddenly from the sea, the captain has good eyes and can make it out, too.

"That simplifies matters. Take off your coat, Bob, for I see those rascals have carried away the rope with them."

Bob obeys, and the dominie, seeing what is up, hands over his outer garment. With some bits of cord Shackleford splices these coats together by the arms, forming a rude rope some ten feet in length.

This done he thrusts one end of it into Bob's hands and clambers over the edge of the descent. It slopes a little, so that all of his weight does not hang upon the coats.

In a minute he is hanging from the extreme end; nothing has given away, and his feet are not more than a yard from the bottom. He drops; there is a scrambling sound as he plunges down the face of the rock; he lands in a heap, springs to his feet, draws the ladder from its place of concealment, and, with all his strength rears it against the wall; then Bob's hand clutches it, and the difficulty has been bridged. Fortunate, indeed, will they be if the troubles that hang over their near future can be brushed aside as easily.

One by one the party descend. There is no time for ceremony now, and whoever is nearest the ladder goes down. Bob steadies it until all are safe below; then he follows suit.

The tourists have already started downward again, for he has called to them not to wait. It is a ticklish job descending that ladder without some strong hand above, especially when the side of the mountain seems unsteady. Perhaps it is the slipping of the ladder he feels, but Bob has an idea the rocks are trembling as though in the premonitory symptoms of a convulsion.

He arrives safely at the bottom, to find that after all one has remained behind; the hands of love have been upon the ladder, for Nina, his own dearly beloved wife, has waited. How pleasant is the thought that now they belong to each other, in life or death, adversity or prosperity, for time and eternity.

Arm in arm they follow the others, nor can they fail to note with alarm how dark it has suddenly become. The day is old, to begin with, and clouds have obscured the sky that was so bright and smiling while the wedding on old Vesuvius was going on. To add to it all, this strange bank of fog, which has swept along the coast so suddenly, envelopes them in its damp folds, and has already blotted out every object in the lower region which they are yearning to reach.

The situation is enough in itself to fill one's soul with horror, and the ladies would be appalled only for the brave hearts beside them, and on which they have already learned to rely.

Under such circumstances it stands to reason that their progress is slow. The route is dangerous, and the dark curtains drawing closer around them shut out what little light they have received.

A weird glow hangs over the crater above—it is the only thing they can with distinctness see, and of course is the least reassuring of all, since it is an object they dread.

Are there others upon this bleak mountain side? Shackelford is ready to declare that once or twice he has heard voices below. Perhaps their guides have found their progress retarded by the sweeping mist and strange gloom. They may even have become lost; stranger things than that have happened within the experience of Shackelford, who does not place much dependence upon this class of men as a general rule, although on this occasion he confesses he has been foolishly blind.

All the same he waits for Bob, and lets him know what he has heard. If the desperate men they have arrayed against them want to meet the little party with hostile intent, even in the midst of this appalling darkness, they will accommodate them. It is to be hoped, however, that such a collision may not take place, for here are four ladies along, and bullets have a faculty for finding the innocent in affairs of this sort.

Never in all their lives have the two comrades ever come so near despair as on this occasion. It seems to them that their whole lives have led up to this hour; that a grand climax is about to take place. Will it be the finale of their existence, the death of the bright hopes of a sweet future to be spent in the society of those they love? Having won, will fate cheat them out of wearing the jewels they have fought so desperately for?

God alone knows.

Morning, if it ever comes, will either find them safe, or else look upon their doom.

No wonder they strive to overcome the terrible difficulties in their way. Who would not fight for life when it holds such pleasant prospects ahead?

Bob Crane looks back and shudders to remember how a young friend of his met death in a storm on Lake Michigan when on his wedding trip, the ill-fated propeller *Algonquin* going down with every soul on board. When danger's hand begins to cast an ominous shadow it is strange how all such things begin to flash vividly before the mind. He brushes them to one side as though they are mocking imps delighting in his torture, applying himself with grim determination to the task before him.

They *must* be saved. Death at this supreme hour of life would be too cruel.

He hears Shackelford's warning concerning the possible presence of others near by, and grits his teeth with almost savage satisfaction at the thought of meeting those to whom something of this trouble is due.

Ricocco Morisini seeks a terrible revenge, does he? Perhaps he is at home upon this black-rocked mountain, this mighty vent of a world's internal fires. He may know secret paths which shorten distances; yes, it is even possible he may be able to devise means which will further delay their downward progress, perhaps prevent them from escape until the sea of molten lava bubbles over the crater's border and comes leaping and tossing down upon them like fires of Hades.

The thought is agony to this brave soul; he presses Nina nearer his breast, and with difficulty keeps back a groan of mental anguish. It must not be. Heaven has been kind in the past, and perhaps the sweet little cherubs aloft that all sailors believe in, may continue to watch over and guide their fortunes, allowing them to reach a port of safety.

People age fast when the mind is racked by such terrible doubts and fears. Bob has an idea that if he lives through this night he will be as gray as Shackelford. Poor fellow! He does not yet dream of the horrors in store for the little party, beside which their present situation, desperate though it may seem, must sink into insignificance.

They have shouted to each other from time to time—a cheery human voice does much under such distressing surroundings to revive the drooping heart.

Monsieur Bob hears other shouts besides, and they sound to his ear as though filled with mockery. He feels that the demons are laughing at him. It is as though mad imps have come on from the steaming cracks in the black rocks to gloat over their misfortunes, and taunt their misery.

Now these sound close at hand, and Bob's hand steals toward his weapons as though he expects an immediate attack; anon they are further away, but always mocking in their tone.

The ladies begin to show some signs of the fear that has wrestled with their hearts for half an hour. They watch the faces of their defenders more anxiously in the weird light which is their only mainstay, and hang upon their every word, as though seeking to find encouragement there.

Bravely they bear up, though; all are thankful for this fact. A nervous, fainting woman at a time like this might mean death to all.

Something tells Bob they will soon meet the man whose shouts taunt them. Their progress has been fairly good, and this, it cannot be doubted, displeases Morisini and his friends, who have sworn an oath that these people shall never leave the rocks of Vesuvius again.

The male members of the party are warned.

Together they number six, but as the dominie is a man of peace, they do not depend on him, though perhaps he may readily defend the ladies, if it comes to that.

Fortunately the American consul is armed. and as his life, together with others, is in danger, he stands ready with true Yankee courage to fight like a tiger.

As far as Monsieur Bob can decide, they have in this short hour descended about half of Vesuvius' rugged sides. Whether the worst lies before them still or not, depends a great deal upon circumstances. At any rate one thing is certain, and it pleases them to realize that they no longer stand upon the thin crust near the crater, with that uneasy demon of chaotic fire under their feet. They breathe easier when the face of the scored rocks, blackened by previous eruptions, feels fairly cool to the hand.

When Bob looks upward again he cannot fail to observe that the light above has grown stronger. Seen through the fog that steals up the mountain higher than ever known before, its strange appearance is doubly marked. Somehow all other dangers pale into insignificance when compared with the one that threatens them from old mother earth herself.

Where will they meet the enemy? In this semi-gloom the others may even lie in ambush, and fall upon them unexpectedly. To guard against this is the design of Bob Crane, and he keeps the situation fully in mind. He no longer follows, but has taken his rightful place as leader. Between Abdul Medshid and the dominie his wife is well looked after.

Suddenly, from the darkness below sounds a human voice.

"Monsieur Bob!" it rings out.

He is not deceived; though some of the others give exclamations of joy and speak of a rescue, the man from Chicago has detected the notes of deep hatred in that tone.

"Who calls?" he sends downward.

There wells up a laugh—a cold, fiendish laugh that would freeze the blood of a timid soul.

"Ah! You are there?" cries the voice in

French, "you and the rest of your dear friends? Well, that is all the farther you will come."

"Is that you, Morisini?" the American calls.

"You have said it. I have come from Algiers for revenge. This night gluts me."

Monsieur Bob, for the sake of the dear little woman so precious to him, makes one appeal.

"Morisini, you no doubt call yourself a brave man. Prove it now. Help us as a party to escape the terrible doom that threatens. On my part, as it is myself you hate, I solemnly promise to give you satisfaction, to fight you when and where you will, with sword, pistol or gatling gun. It is to save the lives of these ladies I ask this favor."

There comes an immediate reply up the narrow canyon through which the path leads; the only way of passing up or down.

"Monsieur Bob, I refuse for several reasons. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. You are an expert with sword and pistol; you might destroy me; then where is my revenge? Again, your friend, the English baboon, has stolen my Nanette. At least I hoped to make her mine some day. Now she is lost. I hate you all. Others are with me who will laugh to see death fall upon you all. Call to me for no mercy. There is only one chance left."

"Well, what is that?" asks Bob, coolly, as this monster in human form ceases to speak.

"Here is an avenue; at the end we lie in wait with drawn weapons; death hovers over. If so be you are not cowards, advance along this path and meet us. We will warmly welcome you, Monsieur Bob, the brave champion of all womankind in distress. Hi, there, modern Don Quixote, place your lance in rest, and charge the wind-mill ahead!"

How sarcastic his words! They set Bob Crane's blood on fire. He realizes the fact that with these men holding the single avenue of escape, there is no hope for him. A challenge seldom goes unaccepted by this daring man; even while the Italian still hurls his mocking words through the cut in the rocks, Bob has drawn both of his revolvers.

It is a situation the like of which he has never before known in all his life; a time when action depends more upon the impulse of the moment than with the result of reason.

Monsieur Bob forgets that he has companions at his back. He even seems to have lost track of the fact that Nina, whom he loves better than all else on earth, is here, and only remembers the presence of his enemies below.

He utters something beneath his breath. Nina gives a cry of mortal pain, for she sees this young giant who has wound her life around his heart make a sudden rush between the jaws of black rock. In the ever increasing light she can watch him advancing with great strides toward the point where it is certain Morisini, Achmed, el-Gaber, and Heaven alone knows how many other desperadoes, lie in wait to receive him.

"Aleck! Do not let him go alone!" she gasps.

Shackelford up to this second has not realized what Bob has done. Now he sees the retreating figure, and his brave heart beats in full sympathy with his impulsive friend.

"Doctor Carter, remain with the ladies; the rest draw and follow me. We'll see who wins!"

With this the soldier springs into the opening. The others are at his heels—even Campertown, full of fire at the prospect of battle. Upon the heavy atmosphere bursts the sound of sudden firing ahead. Monsieur Bob has doubtless dashed into the midst of his foes with the fury of a western cyclone.

One moment the confusion of battle is plainly heard, and then the puny efforts of man are drowned in a sullen rumble as of mighty thunder. The mountain quakes under their feet as though they stand on a quagmire. The sky is lighted up with a ghastly, yellow glow that seems to bespeak the doom of the universe. Awful internal sounds jar upon the ear and benumb the faculties.

Shackelford halts half-way through the passage—halts as though paralyzed. This awful combination of infernal sounds is not new to him. Far below he hears the shrieks of hundreds, rushing madly from their homes. Looking upward he sees a sight never to be forgotten—a sight that the people of doomed Pompeii last looked upon ere death walled them in. Flames shooting toward the leaden sky. Boiling, molten lava rolling over the edge of the crater. The fires of Hades broken loose!

The dreaded eruption has come.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

Captain Shackelford recognizes the frightful position in which his party is placed. He is horrified, but not paralyzed, by the tremendous event that has taken place.

His first thought is of his wife and those who are with her, and the inclination comes to rush back and rescue them from the awful doom that threatens. Then he remembers Bob, and how his duty lies in that direction.

All signs of battle have died away when old Vesuvius enters into the affair; human passions can hardly war when nature takes her turn. He puts all his power into one shout, that rings along the rocky pass, and must surely reach the ears intended for it.

"Campertown, bring the ladies down!"

Then, while the roaring and hissing still continue in an almost deafening manner at the crater, showing that the internal fires have again leaped beyond all bounds, this brave man dashes on to find Bob.

He reaches the termination of the little pass.

and rushes out upon the open. Here, by the light given forth by the volcanic fires, he looks upon a scene he will not soon forget.

Monsieur Bob is on deck. He has met his foes alone and single handed, and lives to tell the tale. Several men are seen hastening down toward the rocky plain below, one at least limping painfully, as though wounded. In full sight two others are struggling. Even as Shackelford rushes out one snatches a weapon from the other and hurls it with a ringing clatter far down the incline. Then he presses his disarmed antagonist back with the ease of a trained gymnast engaged with an amateur. The captain sees at a glance that Monsieur Bob needs no assistance.

"Beg for your life, you hound," he hears the American shout with fury.

Perhaps the fierce vindictive Italian has had the bravery taken out of him by the sudden and awful bursting out of Vesuvius. At any rate his vaunted courage has oozed from his finger tips, and with Bob's hand upon his throat and death looking him in the face, he begs for his miserable life.

This satisfies the American, who loathes a coward. With a fling he casts the wretched count away from him; then, thinking better of his resolution, he springs forward and with a hearty kick starts the fellow after his fleeing companions. Morisini does not offer to resent the indignity, but eagerly plunges on, calling piteously for the others to wait and not desert him. The events of the last few minutes have changed this man from a terror to a coward.

Monsieur Bob whirls around; he has suddenly remembered those in whose interest he made his bold dash. Shackelford is at his elbow, and shouts out:

"You are not wounded, I hope, Bob?"

"Not seriously—but the others, man?"

"They come!"

His words are indeed true; the others can be seen hastening through the peculiar little gorge. Delay means a horrible death; indeed, with these living streams of hissing lava sweeping down to overwhelm them, it will be by an especial favor of Providence if they escape to tell the tale.

All are speedily gathered in a knot, and both Bob and the soldier have found their own.

"Forward!" comes the cry.

They do not rush madly along, for Bob believes they will run more risks from becoming lost than in any other way. If they can follow the regular trail their chances will be best, because it has been selected on account of its general freedom from overflow during the periodical eruptions.

For all that they make good time. The base of Vesuvius proper is just below, when they will have a living chance. All that has saved them thus far is the fact that the brunt of the explosion and overflow has been in the other quarter, though at any minute it is liable to change, and stones, almost red hot, fall over them, bringing death even before the boiling lava cuts off their escape by forming a river around them.

The light continues to show them their way, which is one advantage, at least, but it is an unearthly glare that illuminates their path. All labor under the deepest excitement, and can never forget the night of terror, if so be the good Captain above allows them to escape from the dreadful calamity that has burst upon the country.

Bob looks back now and then with fear tugging at his heart. He knows how rapidly, like a miniature Niagara, the lava will come leaping down over the precipitous rocks when it does get a start, and his heart is in his throat, so to speak, as he strains his vision looking for this dreaded death doom.

As yet it has not come, and they are close to the base, where a chance of safety will be given them even at the worst.

No doubt all Naples is aroused and grouped upon the flat house tops, where flowers grow and ladies usually promenade, watching with keen interest this wonderful display of Nature's fire-works, having little concern about it, and caring not that hundreds of their fellow beings are fleeing for life on one side of the volcano's base, many of them destined to be overwhelmed in the raging streams of descending lava.

"At last!" shouts Bob, as he sees the deserted buildings which the monks had erstwhile occupied, just before them, at the base of the high cone.

Of course all of them are out of breath and hardly in a condition for a race, but with grim death in the rear people are apt to perform deeds they have believed impossible. A fictitious strength is given even to the weakest, and, once upon the plain, the party continue their flight.

Once again the rocks under their feet quiver in the gigantic throes that mark an earthquake, while the crater vomits forth its fiery contents with a new fervor.

When Monsieur Bob looks backward he has reason to be thankful, for they have left the mountain just in time. The boiling, bubbling streams now rush down in the route they have just come over, and had they been delayed ten minutes their doom must have been sealed. Nothing could have saved them.

Nor are they safe yet, for these streams of lava will run all over the plain, seeking a level; they may be cut off at any minute, surrounded by the awful rivers, and lost.

Already they can see one rolling billow sweeping down to the left, following some old channel, and effectually blocking their progress in that direction at least. Should a similar stream make its appearance on the right they will find themselves hemmed in entirely.

This is likely to happen, for already Bob can see several bright lines upon the side of the volcano. These are small streams, which, when united, will form a torrent that can flow twice as fast as they can run.

The scene is one that almost baffles description, with old Vesuvius bellowing in their rear, sending out her fiery cohorts and sea of molten lava. They see nothing of the men with whom Bob was engaged; probably they took another course, and ere this may have found themselves in the midst of a burning lake.

On, on the fugitives press. The stream beside them grows larger as it receives contributions from various sources. It seems to leap into the air in places where obstructions are met. The atmosphere is heavy and impregnated with the strong odor of brimstone, as though it comes from the workshops of Tophet.

Campertown has done nobly, and assists his

Nanette along with more power than one would believe he possessed. As he turns his head he gives a cry of horror that attracts the attention of the captain, who chances to be near. In an instant he too has fastened his eyes upon the fiery serpent that, with raised head, seems to be leaping after them.

This is the second stream. It will pass them by on the other side, thus shutting them in. Should these two come together below, they will be hemmed in and escape cut off.

Thus it will be seen that their situation is still a terrible one, although they are leaving the cone of the volcano behind. The plain slopes nearly two thousand feet in the two miles, and this descent allows the lava to drop down with a swift passage. It looks like the irresistible swoop of the hawk in the barnyard.

Now the second stream flanks them. How fearfully grand it rushes on! At the start there is the raised head of the yellow serpent. It leaps and splashes, rolling over all obstacles, fighting its way onward and downward, heading for the sea.

Nina is the first one to give out—brave little woman that she is. Bob feels her hang a dead weight on his arm. He hurriedly glances down into her face and sees her smile in a wan sort of way.

"Leave me, dear Bob; I can go no further.

Save yourself, dear," she says in his ear, but he laughs scornfully.

"You forget we are husband and wife, Nina. We live or die together!" he cries.

With that he sweeps her up in his embrace as though she were a child. Once before has he done the same thing, and she can remember her sensations as he handed her up through the narrow window in the wall of the Algerian mosque.

The strong man does not fall behind even when thus burdened. Thank Heaven for those muscles of steel in this hour of need! In his arms Nina feels safe. She cannot account for the peculiarly restful sensation that steals over her. Close to this brave heart, what can harm her now? Let old Vesuvius blaze and roar, let the rivers of lava hem them in, here is one who will find some means of overcoming the powers that be.

Such confidence is certainly sublime, but it may be she overrates the abilities of the man she loves. When the finite mind battles with the dreadful in nature it has an adversary always on the assault and never forced to a defense.

Parallel the raging streams run, now advancing, anon retreating. At times they are so close together that even brave Bob holds his breath in awe lest they unite their forces and prevent further flight. Thus amid mingled hopes and fears the party press on.

While passing along the narrow isthmus that separates the glowing streams, the greatest caution is needed lest one of them trip and fall. To tumble headlong into this liquid fire would mean death instantaneously. A more hideous fate could hardly be conceived.

The hissing sound which arises is like the warning of a den of vipers. It comes from the molten lava seeking contact with the cooler rocks, where perhaps moisture lies. At any rate it adds to the sinister condition of affairs, and causes fresh alarm to creep through the hearts of the ladies.

All this while they have been advancing in an almost direct line for the sea. Even did they desire to turn aside they cannot do so; their course is marked out, and they must walk in it to the end.

Shackelford is a little anxious concerning the yacht, for he knows that earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are generally followed by a tidal wave. If they are fortunate enough to reach the yacht it will be well for them to stand out to sea until this affair is over.

Can they gain the boat? Bob has given orders for the yacht to lie at anchor off the base of the mountain. Unless the eruption has alarmed the captain, and caused him to set sail, the jaunty little *Skip-jack* must be somewhere near.

A short time longer will settle the matter as to whether they must perish under the angry lashing of the raging volcano, or live to enjoy many happy years together.

Even now they can faintly distinguish where the sea lies, though the fog still hangs heavily about. A doubly loud explosion draws the attention of every one to the crater. Has the whole crater blown up? The air seems full of burning particles that rise and fall with graceful waves.

"The top of the cone has blown off. See the avalanche of lava rolling out! It comes this way!" shouts the consul, in despair.

If this overwhelming wave overtakes them ere they reach the water and embark, all is indeed lost. Not one of them hardly dares to breath a hope, but they do not stand in dumb despair, and await the coming of their fate. A last determined rush forward is made, Bob leading the way with his precious burden. He shows no sign of breaking down, though only a giant of his build could carry Nina all this while.

The sea is now before them. How dead and still it looks in the ghastly light. Instead of arousing enthusiasm in the minds of the half-crazed fugitives it appals them. As Shackelford has suspected, this dead calm will doubtless be broken by a tremendous tidal wave that must bring dread ruin along the coast.

They rush down to the edge of the rocks. What a horrible hissing, roaring sound that is, proceeding from the two separate streams of lava rolling into the water! Dense clouds of steam arise, and a sickening odor fills the atmosphere about them.

Monsieur Bob strains his eyes to catch a glimpse of his yacht. Everything depends upon its presence, for that great wave of lava is rushing along beyond the base of the cone, and will soon overtake them.

Thank God! He sights a boat; yes, two of them, just off the shore. In unison the party raise their voices, and a mighty shout rolls down the slope over the devastated vineyards and is thrown out upon the water.

They are discovered. The boats dash toward the spot. Monsieur Bob surveys the scene with an outward coolness he does not feel. It is a race between the boats and the coming avalanche of fire. The boats will win, but every second is precious and not one must be lost. So, like a wise general he divides his forces and directs each soul which craft they are to board.

They almost fall into the boats, such is their mad eagerness to get away; then the sai[illegible]s row like heroes. The wave of lava tumbles over the rocks ere they have gone fifty feet. There is a horrid din, the water heaves, and they can see the shore no longer.

Thankful for the preservation of their lives they hasten to the yacht. As a breeze starts up they head for Naples where the dominie and his two companions are landed. Then the *Skip-jack*, safe in harbor, awaits the tidal wave, escapes injury, and sails out upon the blue Mediterranean early in the morning. Old Vesuvius is still vomiting forth fire and brimstone as they sail away, headed for the Orient, and as Providence has so kindly watched over the fortunes of Monsieur Bob and his friends thus far, let us hope a life of quiet happiness lies before them, tranquil as the blue sea over which their yacht is now gliding.

THE END.

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